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Book Y41s

SELECTED POEMS

BY
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

CELTIC TWILIGHT

RESPONSIBILITIES

POEMS AND PLAYS

THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL

PER AMICA SILENTIA LUNAE

THE CUTTING OF AN AGATE

THE GREEN HELMET AND OTHER
POEMS

THE HOUR GLASS AND OTHER PLAYS

REVERIES OVER CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

THE TABLE OF LAW; AND THE ADORA-
TION OF THE MAGI

STORIES OF RED HANRAHAN, THE SE-
CRET ROSE, ROSA ALCHEMICA

John S. Sargent
1908



Emer. J. Walker Photo

From a charcoal drawing by John S. Sargent, R.A.

Y41s
SELECTED POEMS

BY
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Oct. 31, 19



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1921

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EARLY POEMS
(1885-1892)

TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES

*Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of that company,
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page;
For in the world's first blossoming age
The light fall of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;
And still the starry candles flare
To help her light foot here and there;
And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon her holy quietude.*

*Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because to him, who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,
That God gives unto man in sleep.*

SELECTED POEMS

*For the elemental beings go
About my table to and fro.
In flood and fire and clay and wind,
They huddle from man's pondering mind;
Yet he who treads in austere ways
May surely meet their ancient gaze.
Man ever journeys on with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
A Druid land, a Druid tune!*

*While still I may, I write for you
The love I lived, the dream I knew.
From our birthday, until we die,
Is but the winking of an eye;
And we, our singing and our love,
The mariners of night above,
And all the wizard things that go
About my table to and fro,
Are passing on to where may be,
In truth's consuming ecstasy,
No place for love and dream at all;
For God goes by with white foot-fall.
I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart went with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin built there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavement grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

THE MEDITATION OF THE OLD FISHERMAN

You waves, though you dance by my feet like children at
play,
Though you glow and you glance, though you purr and
you dart;
In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves
were more gay,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;
My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart
That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so fair when his
oar
Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and apart,
Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the
tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white
hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the
weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER

Shy one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room,
Shy in the doorway
And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,
Helpful and shy.
To an isle in the water
With her would I fly.

THE FIDDLER OF DOONEY

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,
My brother in Moharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:
They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time,
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on the three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With "Here is the fiddler of Dooney!"
And dance like a wave of the sea.

THE SONG OF THE OLD MOTHER

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;
And the young lie long and dream in their bed
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,
And their day goes over in idleness,
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:
While I must work because I am old,
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair;
His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
And he had known at last some tenderness,
Before earth made of him her sleepy care;
But when a man poured fish into a pile,
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
And sang how day a Druid twilight sheds
Upon a dim, green, well-beloved isle,
Where people love beside star-laden seas;
How Time may never mar their faery vows
Under the woven roofs of quicken boughs:
The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lisadill;
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
And he had known at last some prudent years
Before they heaped his grave under the hill;
But while he passed before a plashy place,
A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth
Sang how somewhere to north or west or south
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race;
And how beneath those three times blessed skies

SELECTED POEMS

A Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons,
And as it falls awakens leafy tunes:
And at that singing he was no more wise.

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,
He mused upon his mockers: without fail
His sudden vengeance were a country tale,
Now that deep earth has drunk his body in;
But one small knot-grass growing by the pool
Told where, ah, little, all-unneeded voice!
Old Silence bids a lonely folk rejoice,
And chaplet their calm brows with leafage cool;
And how, when fades the sea-strewn rose of day,
A gentle feeling wraps them like a fleece,
And all their trouble dies into its peace:
The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall;
And might have known at last unhaunted sleep
Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,
Now that old earth had taken man and all:
Were not the worms that spired about his bones
A-telling with their low and reedy cry,
Of how God leans His hands out of the sky,
To bless that isle with honey in His tones;
That none may feel the power of squall and wave,
And no one any leaf-crowned dancer miss
Until He burn up Nature with a kiss:
The man has found no comfort in the grave.

THE ROSE OF BATTLE

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled
Above the tide of hours, trouble the air,
And God's bell buoyed to be the water's care;
While hushed from fear, or loud with hope, a band
With blown, spray-dabbled hair gather at hand.
Turn if you may from battles never done,
I call, as they go by me one by one,
Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,
For him who hears love sing and never cease,
Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade:
But gather all for whom no love hath made
A woven silence, or but came to cast
A song into the air, and singing past
To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you
Who have sought more than is in rain or dew
Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,
Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,
Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips;
And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.
The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,
To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell;
God's bell has claimed them by the little cry
Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

SELECTED POEMS

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
You, too, have come where the dim tides are hurled
Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring
The bell that calls us on; the sweet far thing.
Beauty grown sad with its eternity
Made you of us, and of the dim grey sea.
Our long ships loose thought-woven sails and wait,
For God has bid them share an equal fate;
And when at last defeated in His wars,
They have gone down under the same white stars,
We shall no longer hear the little cry
Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

THE TWO TREES

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.
The changing colours of its fruit
Have dowered the stars with merry light;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night;
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody,
And made my lips and music wed,
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.
There, through bewildered branches, go
Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
Tossing and tossing to and fro
The flaming circle of our life.
When looking on their shaken hair,
And dreaming how they dance and dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

Gaze no more in the bitter glass
The demons, with their subtle guile,
Lift up before us when they pass,
Or only gaze a little while;

SELECTED POEMS

For there a fatal image grows,
With broken boughs, and blackened leaves,
And roots half hidden under snows
Driven by a storm that ever grieves.
For all things turn to barrenness
In the dim glass the demons hold,
The glass of outer weariness,
Made when God slept in times of old.
There, through the broken branches, go
The ravens of unresting thought;
Peering and flying to and fro,
To see men's souls bartered and bought.
When they are heard upon the wind,
And when they shake their wings; alas!
Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true;
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

THE BALLAD OF FATHER GILLIGAN

The old priest Peter Gilligan
Was weary night and day;
For half his flock were in their beds,
Or under green sods lay.

Once, while he nodded on a chair,
At the moth-hour of eve,
Another poor man sent for him,
And he began to grieve.

"I have no rest, nor joy, nor peace,
For people die and die";
And after cried he, "God forgive!
My body spake, not I!"

He knelt, and leaning on the chair
He prayed and fell asleep;
And the moth-hour went from the fields,
And stars began to peep.

They slowly into millions grew,
And leaves shook in the wind;
And God covered the world with shade,
And whispered to mankind.

THE BALLAD OF FATHER GILLIGAN

Upon the time of sparrow chirp
When the moths came once more,
The old priest Peter Gilligan
Stood upright on the floor.

"Mavrone, mavrone! the man has died,
While I slept on the chair";
He roused his horse out of its sleep,
And rode with little care.

He rode now as he never rode,
By rocky lane and fen;
The sick man's wife opened the door:
"Father! you come again!"

"And is the poor man dead?" he cried.
"He died an hour ago."
The old priest Peter Gilligan
In grief swayed to and fro.

"When you were gone, he turned and died
As merry as a bird."
The old priest Peter Gilligan
He knelt him at that word.

"He who hath made the night of stars
For souls, who tire and bleed,
Sent one of His great angels down
To help me in my need.

SELECTED POEMS

“ He who is wrapped in purple robes,
With planets in His care,
Had pity on the least of things
Asleep upon a chair.”

THE INDIAN UPON GOD

I passed along the water's edge below the humid trees,
My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes round my
knees,

My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs; and saw the moor-
fowl pace

All dripping on a grassy slope, and saw them cease to
chase

Each other round in circles, and heard the eldest speak:
*Who holds the world between His bill and made us
strong or weak*

*Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.
The rains are from His dripping wing, the moonbeams
from his eye.*

I passed a little further on and heard a lotus talk:
*Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a
stalk,*

*For I am in His image made, and all this tinkling tide
Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.*

A little way within the gloom a roebuck raised his eyes
Brimful of starlight, and he said: *The Stamper of the
Skies,*

*He is a gentle roebuck; for how else, I pray, could he
Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing like
me?*

SELECTED POEMS

I passed a little further on and heard a peacock say:
*Who made the grass and made the worms and made my
feathers gay,*
He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all the night
His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

(1894, REVISED 1911)

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TO FLORENCE FARR

MAURTEEN BRUIN.

BRIDGET BRUIN.

SHAWN BRUIN.

MARY BRUIN.

FATHER HART.

A FAERY CHILD.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

The scene is laid in the Barony of Kilmacowen, in the County of Sliqo, and at a remote time.

SCENE. *A room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep alcove to the Right. There are benches in the alcove and a table; and a crucifix on the wall. The alcove is full of a glow of light from the fire. There is an open door facing the audience to the Left, and to the left of this a bench. Through the door one can see the forest. It is night, but the moon or a late sunset glimmers through the trees and carries the eye far off into a vague, mysterious world. MAURTEEN BRUIN, SHAWN BRUIN, and BRIDGET BRUIN sit in the alcove at the table or about the fire. They are dressed in the costume of some remote time, and near them sits an old priest, FATHER HART. He may be dressed as a friar. There is food and drink upon the table. MARY BRUIN stands by the door reading a book. If she looks up she can see through the door into the wood.*

BRIDGET. Because I bid her clean the pots for supper,
She took that old book down out of the thatch,
She has been doubled over it ever since.
We should be deafened by her groans and moans,
Had she to work as some do, Father Hart,

SELECTED POEMS

Get up at dawn like me and mend and scour;
Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like you,
The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN. Mother, you are too cross.

BRIDGET. You've married her,
And fear to vex her, and so take her part.

MAURTEEN [*to FATHER HART*]. It is but right that
youth should side with youth;
She quarrels with my wife a bit at times,
And is too deep just now in the old book!
But do not blame her greatly; she will grow
As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
When but the moons of marriage dawn and die
For half a score of times.

FATHER HART. Their hearts are wild,
As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET. She would not mind the kettle, milk the cow,
Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

SHAWN. Mother, if only —

MAURTEEN. Shawn, this is half empty;
Go, bring up the best bottle that we have.

FATHER HART. I never saw her read a book before,
What can it be?

MAURTEEN [*to SHAWN*]. What are you waiting for?

You must not shake it when you draw the cork;
It's precious wine, so take your time about it.

[SHAWN *goes.*]

[To PRIEST.] There was a Spaniard wrecked at Ocris Head,

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

When I was young, and I have still some bottles.
He cannot bear to hear her blamed; the book
Has lain up in the thatch these fifty years,
My father told me my grandfather wrote it,
And killed a heifer for the binding of it —
But supper's spread, and we can talk and eat.
It was little good he got out of the book,
Because it filled his house with rambling fiddlers,
And rambling ballad-makers and the like.
The griddle-bread is there in front of you.
Colleen, what is the wonder in that book,
That you must leave the bread to cool? Had I
Or had my father read or written books,
There was no stocking stuffed with yellow guineas
To come when I am dead to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART. You should not fill your head with foolish dreams.

What are you reading?

MARY.

How a Princess Edane,
A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May Eve like this,
And followed, half awake and half asleep,
Until she came into the Land of Faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.
And she is still there, busied with a dance,
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,
Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top.

SELECTED POEMS

MAURTEEN. Persuade the colleen to put down the book;

My grandfather would mutter just such things,
And he was no judge of a dog or a horse,
And any idle boy could blarney him;
Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART. Put it away, my colleen.
God spreads the heavens above us like great wings,
And gives a little round of deeds and days,
And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,
And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,
Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes
Half shuddering and half joyous from God's peace;
And it was some wrecked angel, blind with tears,
Who flattered Edane's heart with merry words.
My colleen, I have seen some other girls
Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
And they grew like their neighbours and were glad
In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes;
For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age bring the red flare again.

MAURTEEN. That's true—but she's too young to know it's true.

BRIDGET. She's old enough to know that it is wrong
To mope and idle.

MAURTEEN. I've little blame for her;
She's dull when my big son is in the fields,
And that and maybe this good woman's tongue

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

Have driven her to hide among her dreams
Like children from the dark under the bed-clothes.

BRIDGET. She'd never do a turn if I were silent.

MAURTEEN. And maybe it is natural upon May Eve
To dream of the good people. But tell me, girl,
If you've the branch of blessed quicken wood
That women hang upon the post of the door
That they may send good luck into the house?
Remember they may steal new-married brides
After the fall of twilight on May Eve,
Or what old women mutter at the fire
Is but a pack of lies.

FATHER HART. It may be truth.
We do not know the limit of those powers
God has permitted to the evil spirits
For some mysterious end. You have done right [*to*
MARY].

It's well to keep old innocent customs up.

[*MARY BRUIN has taken a bough of quicken wood
from a seat and hung it on a nail in the door-post.
A girl child strangely dressed, perhaps in faery
green, comes out of the wood and takes it away.*]

MARY. I had no sooner hung it on the nail
Before a child ran up out of the wind;
She has caught it in her hand and fondled it;
Her face is pale as water before dawn.

FATHER HART. Whose child can this be?

MAURTEEN. No one's child at all.
She often dreams that some one has gone by,
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

SELECTED POEMS

MARY. They have taken away the blessed quicken
wood,
They will not bring good luck into the house;
Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God?

FATHER HART. Colleen, they are the children of the
fiend,
And they have power until the end of Time,
When God shall fight with them a great pitched battle
And hack them into pieces.

MARY. He will smile,
Father, perhaps, and open His great door.

FATHER HART. Did but the lawless angels see that
door,
They would fall, slain by everlasting peace
And when such angels knock upon our doors,
Who goes with them must drive through the same
storm.

*[A thin old arm comes round the door-post and knocks
and beckons. It is clearly seen in the silvery light.]*

MARY BRUIN goes to door and stands in it for a
moment. MAURTEEN BRUIN is busy filling FA-
THER HART'S plate. BRIDGET BRUIN stirs the
fire.]

MARY *[coming to table]*. There's somebody out
there that beckoned me
And raised her hand as though it held a cup,
And she was drinking from it, so it may be
That she is thirsty. *[She takes milk from the table and
carries it to the door.]*

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

FATHER HART. That will be the child
That you would have it was no child at all.

BRIDGET. And maybe, Father, what he said was true;
For there is not another night in the year
So wicked as to-night.

MAURTEEN. Nothing can harm us
While the good Father's underneath our roof.

MARY. A little queer old woman dressed in green.

BRIDGET. The good people beg for milk and fire,
Upon May Eve — woe to the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.

MAURTEEN. Hush, woman, hush!

BRIDGET. She's given milk away.
I knew she would bring evil on the house.

MAURTEEN. Who was it?

MARY. Both the tongue and face were
strange.

MAURTEEN. Some strangers came last week to
Clover Hill;
She must be one of them.

BRIDGET. I am afraid.

FATHER HART. The Cross will keep all evil from
the house
While it hangs there.

MAURTEEN. Come, sit beside me, colleen,
And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days,
Like the good glow of the turf; and when I die
You'll be the wealthiest hereabout, for, colleen,
I have a stocking full of yellow guineas

SELECTED POEMS

Hidden away where nobody can find it.

BRIDGET. You are the fool of every pretty face,
And I must spare and pinch that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head. .

MAURTEEN. Do not be cross; she is a right good
girl!

The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart,
My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change
Done well for me and for old Bridget there?

We have a hundred acres of good land,
And sit beside each other at the fire.

I have this reverend Father for my friend,
I look upon your face and my son's face —

We've put his plate by yours — and here he comes,
And brings with him the only thing we have lacked,
Abundance of good wine. [SHAWN comes in.] Stir
up the fire,

And put new turf upon it till it blaze.

To watch the turf-smoke coiling from the fire,

And feel content and wisdom in your heart,

This is the best of life; when we are young

We long to tread a way none trod before,

But find the excellent old way through love,

And through the care of children, to the hour

For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-bye.

[MARY takes a sod of turf from the fire and goes out
through the door. SHAWN follows her and meets
her coming in.]

SHAWN. What is it draws you to the chill o' the
wood?

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

There is a light among the stems of the trees
That makes one shiver.

MARY. A little queer old man
Made me a sign to show he wanted fire
To light his pipe.

BRIDGET. You've given milk and fire,
Upon the unluckiest night of the year, and brought,
For all you know, evil upon the house.
Before you married you were idle and fine,
And went about with ribbons on your head;
And now — no, Father, I will speak my mind,
She is not a fitting wife for any man —

SHAWN. Be quiet, Mother!

MAURTEEN. You are much too cross.

MARY. What do I care if I have given this house,
Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
Into the power of faeries!

BRIDGET. You know well
How calling the good people by that name,
Or talking of them overmuch at all,
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MARY. Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house!
Let me have all the freedom I have lost;
Work when I will and idle when I will!
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind.
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

FATHER HART. You cannot know the meaning of
your words.

SELECTED POEMS

MARY. Father, I am right weary of four tongues:
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,
And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

[SHAWN BRUIN *leads her to a seat at the left of the door.*]

SHAWN. Do not blame me; I often lie awake
Thinking that all things trouble your bright head.
How beautiful it is — your broad pale forehead
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair!
Sit down beside me here — these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MARY. O, you are the great door-post of this house
And I the branch of blessed quicken wood,
And if I could I'd hang upon the post,
Till I had brought good luck into the house.

[*She would put her arms about him, but looks shyly at the priest and lets her arms fall.*]

FATHER HART. My daughter, take his hand; by love
alone
God binds us to Himself and to the hearth,
That shuts us from the waste beyond His peace
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN. Would that the world were mine to give i
you,
And not its quiet hearths alone, but even
All that bewilderment of light and freedom.
If you would have it.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

MARY. I would take the world
And break it into pieces in my hands
To see you smile watching it crumble away.
SHAWN. Then I would mould a world of fire and
dew,

With no one bitter, grave, or over wise,
And nothing marred or old to do you wrong,
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MARY. Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN. Once a fly dancing in a beam of the sun,
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament
Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold
With my warm heart for ever; the sun and moon
Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll;
But your white spirit still walk by my spirit.

[*A Voice singing in the wood.*]

MAURTEEN. There's some one singing. Why, it's
but a child.

It sang, "The lonely of heart is withered away."
A strange song for a child, but she sings sweetly,
Listen, listen! [*Goes to door.*]

MARY. O, cling close to me,
Because I have said wicked things to-night.

THE VOICE. The wind blows out of the gates of the
day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away.

SELECTED POEMS

While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
"When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung
The lonely of heart is withered away!"

MAURTEEN. Being happy, I would have all others
happy,
So I will bring her in out of the cold.

[*He brings in the faery child.*]

THE CHILD. I tire of winds and waters and pale
lights.

MAURTEEN. And that's no wonder, for when night
has fallen
The wood's a cold and a bewildering place;
But you are welcome here.

THE CHILD. I am welcome here.
For when I tire of this warm little house,
There is one here that must away, away.

MAURTEEN. O, listen to her dreamy and strange
talk.
Are you not cold?

THE CHILD. I will crouch down beside you,
For I have run a long, long way this night.

BRIDGET. You have a comely shape.

MAURTEEN. Your hair is wet.

BRIDGET. I'll warm your chilly feet.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

MAURTEEN.

You have come indeed

A long, long way — for I have never seen
Your pretty face — and must be tired and hungry,
Here is some bread and wine.

THE CHILD.

The wine is bitter.

Old mother, have you no sweet food for me?

BRIDGET. I have some honey. [*She goes into the next room.*]

MAURTEEN.

You have coaxing ways,

The mother was quite cross before you came.

[*BRIDGET returns with the honey and fills a porringer with milk.*]

BRIDGET. She is the child of gentle people; look
At her white hands and at her pretty dress.
I've brought you some new milk, but wait a while
And I will put it to the fire to warm,
For things well fitted for poor folk like us
Would never please a high-born child like you.

THE CHILD. From dawn, when you must blow the
fire ablaze,
You work your fingers to the bone, old mother.
The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you must work your fingers to the bone
Because your heart is old.

BRIDGET.

The young are idle.

THE CHILD. Your memories have made you wise, old
father,
The young must sigh through many a dream and hope,
But you are wise because your heart is old.

[*BRIDGET gives her more bread and honey.*]

SELECTED POEMS

MAURTEEN. O, who would think to find so young
a girl
Loving old age and wisdom?

THE CHILD. No more, mother.

MAURTEEN. What a small bite! The milk is ready
now. [*Hands it to her*].

What a small sip

THE CHILD. Put on my shoes, old mother.
Now I would like to dance, now I have eaten.
The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,
And I would like to dance until the reeds
And the white waves have danced themselves asleep.

[BRIDGET *puts on the shoes, and the CHILD is about*
to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks
and covers her eyes.]

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER HART. You cannot know how naughty your
words are!

That is our Blessed Lord.

THE CHILD Hide it away.

BRIDGET. I have begun to be afraid again.

THE CHILD. Hide it away.

MAURTEEN. That would be wickedness!

BRIDGET. That would be sacrilege!

THE CHILD. The tortured thing
Hide it away!

MAURTEEN. Her parents are to blame.

FATHER HART. That is the image of the Son of God

THE CHILD [*caressing him*]. Hide it way, hide it
away!

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

MAURTEEN. No, no.

FATHER HART. Because you are so young and like a bird,

That must take fright at every stir of the leaves,
I will go take it down.

THE CHILD. Hide it away!

And cover it out of sight and out of mind!

[FATHER HART takes crucifix from wall and carries it towards inner room.]

FATHER HART. Since you have come into this barony,
I will instruct you in our blessed faith;
And being so keen-witted you'll soon learn.

[To the others.] We must be tender to all budding things,

Our Maker let no thought of Calvary

Trouble the morning stars in their first song.

[Puts crucifix in inner room.]

THE CHILD. Here is level ground for dancing; I will dance.

[Sings.] "The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away."

[She dances.]

MARY [to SHAWN]. Just now when she came near

I thought I heard

Other small steps beating upon the floor,

And a faint music blowing in the wind,

Invisible pipes giving her feet the tune.

SHAWN. I heard no steps but hers.

MARY.

I hear them now,

SELECTED POEMS

The unholy powers are dancing in the house.

MAURTEEN. Come over here, and if you promise me,
Not to talk wickedly of holy things,
I will give you something.

THE CHILD. Bring it me, old father.

MAURTEEN. Here are some ribbons that I bought
in the town

For my son's wife — but she will let me give them
To tie up that wild hair the winds have tumbled.

THE CHILD. Come, tell me, do you love me?

MAURTEEN. Yes, I love you.

THE CHILD. Ah, but you love this fireside. Do you
love me?

FATHER HART. When the Almighty puts so great a
share

Of His own ageless youth into a creature,
To look is but to love.

THE CHILD. But you love Him?

BRIDGET. She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD. And do you love me too?

MARY. I do not know.

THE CHILD. You love that young man there,
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

MARY. Queen of Angels and kind saints defend us!
Some dreadful thing will happen. A while ago
She took away the blessed quicken wood.

FATHER HART. You fear because of her unmeasured
prattle;

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

She knows no better. Child, how old are you?

THE CHILD. When winter sleep is abroad my hair
grows thin,

My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms;
I'll soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can tell
When I was born for the first time? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
That blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER HART. O she is of the faery people.

THE CHILD. One called,

I sent my messengers for milk and fire,
She called again, and after that I came.

[ALL except SHAWN and MARY BRUIN gather behind
the priest for protection.]

SHAWN [*rising*]. Though you have made all these
obedient,

You have not charmed my sight, and won from me
A wish or gift to make you powerful;
I'll turn you from the house.

FATHER HART. No, I will face her.

THE CHILD. Because you took away the crucifix
I am so mighty that there's none can pass
Unless I will it, where my feet have danced
Or where I've whirled my finger tops.

[SHAWN tries to approach her and cannot.]

MAURTEEN. Look, look!

SELECTED POEMS

There something stops him — look how he moves his
hands

As though he rubbed them on a wall of glass.

FATHER HART. I will confront this mighty spirit
alone;

Be not afraid, the Father is with us,
The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,
And He who died and rose on the third day,
And all the nine angelic hierarchies.

[THE CHILD *kneels upon the settle beside MARY and
puts her arms about her.*]

Cry, daughter, to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD. You shall go with me, newly-married
bride,

And gaze upon a merrier multitude.
White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds,
Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him
Who is the ruler of the Western Host,
Finvarra and their Land of Heart's Desire,
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

SHAWN. Awake out of that trance — and cover up
Your eyes and ears.

FATHER HART. She must both look and listen,
For only the soul's choice can save her now.
Come over to me, daughter; stand beside me;
Think of this house and of your duties in it.

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

THE CHILD. Stay and come with me, newly-married
bride,

For if you hear him you grow like the rest,
Bear children, cook, and bend above the churn,
And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
Until at last, grown old and bitter of tongue,
You're crouching there and shivering at the grave.

FATHER HART. Daughter, I point you out the way
to Heaven.

THE CHILD. But I can lead you, newly-married
bride,

Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity;
For we are but obedient to the thoughts
That drift into the mind at a wink of the eye.

FATHER HART. By the dear Name of the One cruci-
fied,

I bid you, Mary Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD. I keep you in the name of your own
heart.

FATHER HART. Because I put away the crucifix
I am but nothing, and my power is nothing.
I'll bring it here again.

MAURTEEN [*clinging to him*]. No.

BRIDGET.

Do not leave us.

FATHER HART. O, let me go before it is too late;
It is my sin alone that brought it all.

[*Singing outside.*]

SELECTED POEMS

THE CHILD. I hear them sing, "Come, newly-married bride,
Come, to the woods and waters and pale lights."

MARY. I will go with you.

FATHER HART. She is lost, alas!

THE CHILD [*standing by the door*]. But clinging
mortal hope must fall from you,
For we who ride the winds, run on the waves,
And dance upon the mountains, are more light
Than dew-drops on the banner of the dawn.

MARY. O, take me with you.

SHAWN. Beloved, I will keep you.
I've more than words, I have these arms to hold you,
Nor all the faery host, do what they please,
Can ever loosen you out of these arms.

MARY. Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD. Come, newly-married bride.

MARY. I always loved her world — and yet — and
yet —

THE CHILD. White bird, white bird, come with me,
little bird.

MARY. She is calling me!

THE CHILD. Come with me, little bird.

[*Distant dancing figures appear in the wood.*]

MARY. I can hear songs and dancing.

SHAWN. Stay with me.

MARY. I think that I would stay — and yet — and
yet —

THE CHILD. Come, little bird, with crest of gold.

MARY [*very softly*]. And yet —

THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE

THE CHILD. Come, little bird with silver feet!

[MARY BRUIN *dies, and the CHILD goes.*]

SHAWN. She is dead!

BRIDGET. Come from that image; body and soul are gone;

You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves,
Or bole of an ash tree changed into her image.

FATHER HART. Thus do the spirits of evil snatch
their prey,

Almost out of the very hand of God;
And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart.

[*Outside there are dancing figures, and it may be a
white bird, and many voices singing:*]

"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away;
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say —
'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away.'"

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

(1893, REVISED 1911)

TO MAUD GONNE

SHEMUS RUA
 MARY
 TEIG
 ALEEL
 THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN
 OONA
 TWO DEMONS *disguised as* MERCHANTS
 PEASANTS, SERVANTS, ANGELICAL BEINGS, SPIRITS

The scene is laid in Ireland, and in old times

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

SCENE I

SCENE. *A room with lighted fire, and a door into the open air, through which one sees, perhaps, the trees of a wood, and these trees should be painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky. The walls are of one colour. The scene should have the effect of missal painting. MARY, a woman of forty years or so, is grinding a quern.*

MARY. What can have made the grey hen flutter so?
[TEIG, a boy of fourteen, is coming in with turf, which he lays beside the hearth.]

TEIG. They say that now the land is famine struck,
The graves are walking.

MARY. There is something that the hen hears.

TEIG. And that is not the worst; at Tubber-vanach
A woman met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

MARY. What can have kept your father all this
while?

TEIG. Two nights ago at Carrick-orus churchyard,
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,
Nor eyes, nor ears; his face a wall of flesh;
He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

MARY. Look out, and tell me if your father's coming.
[TEIG goes to the door.]

SELECTED POEMS

TEIG. Mother!

MARY. What is it?

TEIG. In the bush beyond,
There are two birds — if you can call them birds —
I could not see them rightly for the leaves.
But they've the shape and colour of horned owls,
And I'm half certain they've a human face.

MARY. Mother of God, defend us!

TEIG. They're looking at me.
What is the good of praying? father says.
God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep.
What do they care, he says, though the whole land
Squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth?

MARY. You'll bring misfortune with your blasphemies
Upon your father, or yourself, or me.
I would to God he were home — ah, there he is.

[SHEMUS comes in.]

What was it kept you in the wood? You know
I cannot get all sorts of accidents
Out of my mind till you are home again.

SHEMUS. I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter.
Although I tramped the woods for half a day,
I've taken nothing, for the very rats,
Badgers, and hedgehogs, seem to have died of drought,
And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.

TEIG. Then you have brought no dinner.

SHEMUS. After that
I sat among the beggars at the cross-roads,
And held a hollow hand among the others.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

MARY. What, did you beg?

SHEMUS. I had no chance to beg,
For when the beggars saw me they cried out
They would not have another share their alms,
And hunted me away with sticks and stones.

TEIG. You said that you would bring us food or
money.

SHEMUS. What's in the house?

TEIG. A bit of mouldy bread.

MARY. There's flour enough to make another loaf.

TEIG. And when that's gone?

MARY. There is the hen in the coop.

SHEMUS. My curse upon the beggars, my curse upon
them.

TEIG. And the last penny gone.

SHEMUS. When the hen's gone,
What can we do but live on sorrel and dock,
And dandelion, till our mouths are green?

MARY. God, that to this hour's found bit and sup,
Will cater for us still.

SHEMUS. His kitchen's bare.
There were five doors that I looked through this day.
And saw the dead and not a soul to wake them.

MARY. Maybe He'd have us die because He knows,
When the ear is stopped and when the eye is stopped,
That every wicked sight is hid from the eye,
And all fool talk from the ear.

SHEMUS. Who's passing there?
And mocking us with music?

[*A stringed instrument without.*]

SELECTED POEMS

TEIG. A young man plays it,
There's an old woman and a lady with him.

SHEMUS. What is the trouble of the poor to her?
Nothing at all or a harsh radishy sauce
For the day's meat.

MARY. God's pity on the rich.
Had we been through as many doors, and seen
The dishes standing on the polished wood
In the wax candle light, we'd be as hard,
And there's the needle's eye at the end of all.

SHEMUS. My curse upon the rich.

TEIG. They're coming here.

SHEMUS. Then down upon that stool, down quick, I say,

And call up a whey face and a whining voice,
And let your head be bowed upon your knees.

MARY. Had I but time to put the place to rights.

[CATHLEEN, OONA AND ALEEL *enter.*]

CATHLEEN. God save all here. There is a certain house,
An old grey castle with a kitchen garden,
A cider orchard and a plot for flowers,
Somewhere among these woods.

MARY. We know it, Lady.
A place that's set among impassable walls
As though world's trouble could not find it out.

CATHLEEN. It may be that we are that trouble, for
we —

Although we've wandered in the wood this hour—
Have lost it too, yet I should know my way,
For I lived all my childhood in that house.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

MARY. Then you are Countess Cathleen?

CATHLEEN. And this woman,
Oona, my nurse, should have remembered it,
For we were happy for a long time there.

OONA. The paths are overgrown with thickets now,
Or else some change has come upon my sight.

CATHLEEN. And this young man, that should have
known the woods —
Because we met him on their border but now,
Wandering and singing like a wave of the sea —
Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come
That he can give no help.

MARY. You have still some way,
But I can put you on the trodden path
Your servants take when they are marketing.
But first sit down and rest yourself awhile,
For my old fathers served your fathers, Lady,
Longer than books can tell — and it were strange
If you and yours should not be welcome here.

CATHLEEN. And it were stranger still were I un-
grateful
For such kind welcome — but I must be gone,
For the night's gathering in.

SHEMUS. It is a long while
Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it.

CATHLEEN. So you are starving even in this wood,
Where I had thought I would find nothing changed.
But that's a dream, for the old worm o' the world
Can eat its way into what place it pleases.

[She gives money.]

SELECTED POEMS

TEIG. Beautiful lady, give me something too;
I fell but now, being weak with hunger and thirst,
And lay upon the threshold like a log.

CATHLEEN. I gave for all and that was all I
had.

Look, my purse is empty. I have passed
By starving men and women all this day,
And they have had the rest; but take the purse,
The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle.
But if you'll come to-morrow to my house
You shall have twice the sum.

[ALEEL *begins to play.*]

SHEMUS [*muttering*]. What, music, music!

CATHLEEN. Ah, do not blame the finger on the
string;

The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times
And find distraction for my thoughts, or else
Pine to my grave.

SHEMUS. I have said nothing, lady.
Why should the like of us complain?

OONA. Have done.
Sorrows that she's but read of in a book
Weigh on her mind as if they had been her own.

[OONA, MARY, and CATHLEEN *go out.*]

ALEEL *looks defiantly at SHEMUS.*]

ALEEL [*singing*]. Were I but crazy for love's sake
I know who'd measure out his length,
I know the heads that I should break,
For crazy men have double strength.
There! all's out now to leave or take,

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

And who mocks music mocks at love;
And when I'm crazy for love's sake
I'll not go far to choose.

[*Snapping his fingers in SHEMUS' face.*]

Enough

I know the heads that I shall break.

[*He takes a step towards the door and then turns again.*]

Shut to the door before the night has fallen,
For who can say what walks, or in what shape
Some devilish creature flies in the air, but now
Two grey-horned owls hooted above our heads.

[*He goes out, his singing dies away. MARY comes in.*

SHEMUS has been counting the money.]

TEIG. There's no good luck in owls, but it may be
That the ill luck's to fall upon their heads.

MARY. You never thanked her ladyship.

SHEMUS.

Thank her,

For seven halfpence and a silver bit?

TEIG. But for this empty purse?

SHEMUS.

What's that for thanks,

Or what's the double of it that she promised?

With bread and flesh and every sort of food,

Up to a price no man has heard the like of,

And rising every day.

MARY.

We have all she had;

She emptied out the purse before our eyes.

SHEMUS [*to Mary, who has gone to close the door*].

Leave that door open.

MARY. When those that have read books,

SELECTED POEMS

And seen the seven wonders of the world,
Fear what's above or what's below the ground,
It's time that poverty should bolt the door.

SHEMUS. I'll have no bolts, for there is not a thing
That walks above the ground or under it
I had not rather welcome to this house
Than any more of mankind, rich or poor.

TEIG. So that they brought us money.

SHEMUS. I heard say
There's something that appears like a white bird,
A pigeon or a seagull or the like,
But if you hit it with a stone or a stick
It clangs as though it had been made of brass;
And that if you dig down where it was scratching
You'll find a crock of gold.

TEIG. But dream of gold
For three nights running, and there's always gold.

SHEMUS. You might be starved before you've dug it
out.

TEIG. But maybe if you called, something would
come,
They have been seen of late.

MARY. Is it call devils?
Call devils from the wood, call them in here?

SHEMUS. So you'd stand up against me, and you'd
say
Who or what I am to welcome here.

[*He hits her.*]

That is to show who's master.

TEIG. Call them in.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

MARY. God help us all!

SHEMUS. Pray, if you have a mind to.
It's little that the sleepy ears above
Care for your words; but I'll call what I please.

TEIG. There is many a one, they say, had money from
them.

SHEMUS [*at door*]. Whatever you are that walk the
woods at night,
So be it that you have not shouldered up
Out of a grave — for I'll have nothing human —
And have free hands, a friendly trick of speech,
I welcome you. Come, sit beside the fire.
What matter if your head's below your arms,
Or you've a horse's tail to whip your flank,
Feathers instead of hair; that's but a straw;
Come, share what bread and meat is in the house,
And stretch your heels and warm them in the ashes.
And after that, let's share and share alike
And curse all men and women. Come in, come in.
What, is there no one there? [*turning from door*].

And yet they say

They are as common as the grass, and ride
Even upon the book in the priest's hand.

[TEIG lifts one arm slowly and points towards the
door and begins moving backwards. SHEMUS turns,
he also sees something and begins moving backward.
MARY does the same. A man dressed as an Eastern
merchant comes in, carrying a small carpet. He
unrolls it and sits cross-legged at one end of it.
Another man dressed in the same way follows, and

SELECTED POEMS

sits at the other end. This is done slowly and deliberately. When they are seated they take money out of embroidered purses at their girdles and begin arranging it on the carpet.]

TEIG. You speak to them.

SHEMUS.

No, you.

TEIG.

'Twas you that called them.

SHEMUS [*coming nearer*]. I'd make so bold, if you would pardon it,

To ask if there's a thing you'd have of us.

Although we are but poor people, if there is,

Why, if there is —

FIRST MERCHANT. We've travelled a long road,
For we are merchants that must tramp the world,
And now we look for supper and a fire
And a safe corner to count money in.

SHEMUS. I thought you were . . . but that's no matter now —

There had been words between my wife and me
Because I said I would be master here,
And ask in what I pleased or who I pleased.
And so . . . But that is nothing to the point,
Because it's certain that you are but merchants.

FIRST MERCHANT. We travel for the Master of all
merchants.

SHEMUS. Yet if you were that I had thought but
now

I'd welcome you no less. Be what you please
And you'll have supper at the market rate,
That means that what was sold for but a penny

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

Is now worth fifty.

[MERCHANTS *begin putting money on carpet.*]

FIRST MERCHANT. Our Master bids us pay
So good a price, that all who deal with us
Shall eat, drink, and be merry.

SHEMUS [*to MARY*]. Bestir yourself,
Go kill and draw the fowl, while Teig and I
Lay out the plates and make a better fire.

MARY. I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS. Not cook! not cook!
Do not be angry. She wants to pay me back
Because I struck her in that argument.
But she'll get sense again. Since the dearth came
We rattle one on another as though we were
Knives thrown into a basket to be cleaned.

MARY. I will not cook for you, because I know
In what unlucky shape you sat but now
Outside this door.

TEIG. It is this way, your honours:
Because of some wild words my father said
She thinks you are not of those who cast a shadow.

SHEMUS. I said I'd make the devils of the wood
Welcome, if they'd a mind to eat and drink;
But it is certain that you are men like us.

FIRST MERCHANT. It's strange that she should think
we cast no shadow,
For there is nothing on the ridge of the world
'That's more substantial than the merchants are
That buy and sell you.

MARY. If you are not demons,

SELECTED POEMS

And seeing what great wealth is spread out there,
Give food or money to the starving poor.

FIRST MERCHANT. If we knew how to find deserving
poor
We'd do our share.

MARY. But seek them patiently.

FIRST MERCHANT. We know the evils of mere
charity.

MARY. Those scruples may befit a common time.
I had thought there was a pushing to and fro
At times like this, that overset the scale
And trampled measure down.

FIRST MERCHANT. But if already
We'd thought of a more prudent way than that?

SECOND MERCHANT. If each one brings a bit of
merchandise,
We'll give him such a price he never dreamt of.

MARY. Where shall the starving come at merchan-
dise?

FIRST MERCHANT. We will ask nothing but what all
men have.

MARY. Their swine and cattle, fields and implements,
Are sold and gone.

FIRST MERCHANT. They have not sold all yet,
For there's a vaporous thing — that may be nothing,
But that's the buyer's risk — a second self,
They call immortal for a story's sake.

SHEMUS. You come to buy our souls?

TEIG. I'll barter mine;
Why should we starve for what may be but nothing?

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

MARY. Teig and Shemus —

SHEMUS. What can it be but nothing,

What has God poured out of His bag but famine?

Satan gives money.

TEIG. Yet no thunder stirs.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is a heap for each.

[SHEMUS goes to take the money.]

But no, not yet.

For there's a work I have to set you to.

SHEMUS. So then you're as deceitful as the rest,

And all that talk of buying what's but a vapour

Is fancy-bread. I might have known as much

Because that's how the trick-o'-the-loop man talks.

FIRST MERCHANT. That's for the work, each has its
separate price;

But neither price is paid till the work's done.

TEIG. The same for me.

MARY. Oh, God, why are you still?

FIRST MERCHANT. You've but to cry aloud at every
cross-road,

At every house door, that we buy men's souls,

And give so good a price that all may live

In mirth and comfort till the famine's done,

Because we are Christian men.

SHEMUS. Come, let's away.

TEIG. I shall keep running till I've earned the price.

SECOND MERCHANT [*who has risen and gone towards
fire*]. Stop, for we obey a generous Master,

That would be served by comfortable men.

And here's your entertainment on the road.

SELECTED POEMS

[TEIG and SHEMUS have stopped. TEIG takes the money. They go out.]

MARY. Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.

You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

SECOND MERCHANT. Curse to your fill, for saints
will have their dreams.

FIRST MERCHANT. Though we're but vermin that
our Master sent

To overrun the world, he at the end
Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon
And quench the stars in the ancestral night.

MARY. God is all-powerful.

SECOND MERCHANT. Pray, you shall need Him.
You shall eat dock, and grass, and dandelion,
Till that low threshold there becomes a wall,
And when your hands can scarcely drag your body
We shall be near you.

[MARY faints.]

[The FIRST MERCHANT takes up the carpet, spreads
it before the fire and stands in front of it warming
his hands.]

FIRST MERCHANT. Our faces go unscratched,
For she has fainted. Wring the neck o' that fowl,
Scatter the flour and search the shelves for bread.
We'll turn the fowl upon the spit and roast it
And eat the supper we were bidden to
Now that the house is quiet; praise our Master;
And stretch and warm our heels among the ashes.

SCENE II

FRONT SCENE. *A wood with perhaps distant view of turreted house at one side. but all in flat colour, without light and shade and against a diapered or gold background.*

COUNTESS CATHLEEN *comes in leaning upon ALEEL'S arm. OONA follows them.*

CATHLEEN [*stopping*]. Surely this leafy corner, where one smells

The wild bee's honey, has a story, too?

OONA. There is the house at last.

ALEEL. A man, they say,

Loved Maeve, the Queen of all the invisible host,

And died of his love nine centuries ago.

And now when the moon's riding at the full,

She leaves her dancers lonely and lies there

Upon that level place, and for three days

Stretches and sighs and wets her long pale cheeks.

CATHLEEN. So she loves truly.

ALEEL. No, but wets her cheeks,

Lady, because she has forgot his name.

CATHLEEN. She'd sleep that trouble away — though
it must be

A heavy trouble to forget his name —

If she had better sense.

SELECTED POEMS

OONA. Your own house, Lady.

ALBEE. She sleeps high up on wintry Knock-na-rea
In an old cairn of stones; while her poor women
Must lie and jog in the wave if they would sleep —
Being water-born — yet, if she cry their names,
They run up on the land and dance in the moon
Till they are giddy and would love as men do,
And be as patient and as pitiful,
But there is nothing that will stop in their heads,
They've such poor memories, though they weep for it.
Oh, yes, they weep; that's when the moon is full.

CATHLEEN. Is it because they have short memories? They live so long?

ALIEL. What's memory but the ash
That chokes our fires that have begun to sink,
And they've a dizzy, everlasting fire.

OONA. There is your own house, Lady.

CATHLEEN. Why, that's true
And we'd have passed it without noticing.

ALEEL. A curse upon it for a meddlesome house!
 Had it but stayed away I would have known
 What Queen Maeve thinks on when the moon is pinched
 And whether now — as in the old days — the dancers
 Set their brief love on men.

OONA. Rest on my arm.
These are no thoughts for any Christian ear.

ALIEL. I am younger, she would be too heavy for you.

[*He begins taking his lute out of the bag; CATHLEEN who has turned towards OONA, turns back to him.*

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

This hollow box remembers every foot
That danced upon the level grass of the world,
And will tell secrets if I whisper to it.

[*Sings.*]

“Lift up the white knee,
That’s what they sing,
Those young dancers
That in a ring
Raved but now
Of the hearts that break
Long, long ago,
For their sake.”

OONA. New friends are sweet.

ALEEL. “But the dance changes,
Lift up the gown,
All that sorrow
Is trodden down.”

OONA. The empty rattle-pate! Lean on this arm,
That I can tell you is a christened arm,
And not like some, if we are to judge by speech.
But as you please. It is time I was forgot.
Maybe it is not upon this arm you slumbered
When you were as helpless as a worm.

ALEEL. Stay with me till we come to your own
house.

CATHLEEN [*sitting down*]. When I am rested, I will
need no help.

ALEEL. I thought to have kept her from remembering

The evil of the times for full ten minutes;

SELECTED POEMS

But now when seven are out you come between.

OONA. Talk on; what does it matter what you say,
For you have not been christened?

ALEEL. Old woman, old woman,
You robbed her of three minutes' peace of mind,
And though you live unto a hundred years,
And wash the feet of beggars and give alms,
And climb Croaghpatrick, you shall not be pardoned.

OONA. How does a man who never was baptized,
Know what Heaven pardons?

ALEEL. You are a sinful woman.

OONA. I care no more than if a pig had grunted.

[Enter CATHLEEN'S STEWARD.]

STEWARD. I am not to blame, for I had locked the
gate,
The forester's to blame. The men climbed in
At the east corner where the elm tree is.

CATHLEEN. I do not understand you; who has
climbed?

STEWARD. Then God be thanked, I am the first to
tell you.

I was afraid some other of the servants —
Though I've been on the watch — had been the first,
And mixed up truth and lies, your ladyship.

CATHLEEN [*rising*]. Has some misfortune happened?

STEWARD. Yes, indeed.

The forester that let the branches lie
Against the wall's to blame for everything.
For that is how the rogues got into the garden.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

CATHLEEN. I thought to have escaped misfortune here.

Has any one been killed?

STEWARD. Oh, no, not killed.

They have stolen half a cart-load of green cabbage.

CATHLEEN. But maybe they were starving.

STEWARD. That is certain.

To rob or starve, that was the choice they had.

CATHLEEN. A learned theologian has laid down
That starving men may take what's necessary,
And yet be sinless.

OONA. Sinless and a thief!

There should be broken bottles on the wall.

CATHLEEN. And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken,
God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world,
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love,
Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world.

[*Enter TEIG and SHEMUS.*]

STEWARD. What are you running for? Pull off your cap.

Do you not see who's there?

SHEMUS. I cannot wait.

I am running to the world with the best news
That has been brought it for a thousand years.

STEWARD. Then get your breath and speak.

SHEMUS. If you'd my news

You'd run as fast and be as out of breath.

SELECTED POEMS

TEIG. Such news, we shall be carried on men's shoulders.

SHEMUS. There's something every man has carried with him

And thought no more about than if it were
A mouthful of the wind; and now it's grown
A marketable thing!

TEIG. And yet it seemed
As useless as the paring of one's nails.

SHEMUS. What sets me laughing when I think of it
Is that a rogue who's lain in lousy straw,
If he but sell it, may set up his coach.

TEIG [*laughing*]. There are two gentlemen who buy
men's souls.

CATHLEEN. O God!

TEIG. And maybe there's no soul at all

STEWARD. They're drunk or mad.

TEIG. Look at the price they give
[*Showing money.*]

SHEMUS. [*tossing up money*]. "Go cry it all about
the world," they said.

"Money for souls, good money for a soul."

CATHLEEN. Give twice and thrice and twenty times
their money,

And get your souls again. I will pay all.

SHEMUS. Not we, not we. For souls — if there are
souls —

But keep the flesh out of its merriment.

I shall be drunk and merry.

TEIG. Come, let's away. [*He goes.*]

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

CATHLEEN. But there's a world to come.

SHEMUS. And if there is,

I'd rather trust myself into the hands

That can pay money down, than to the hands

That have but shaken famine from the bag.

[*He goes out but one hears his voice lilting.*]

There's money for a soul, sweet yellow money.

There's money for men's souls, good money, money."

CATHLEEN [*to ALEEL*]. Go call them here again,

bring them by force,

Beseech them, bribe, do anything you like

[*ALEEL goes.*]

And you too, follow, add your prayers to his.

[*OONA, who has been praying, goes out.*]

CATHLEEN. Steward, you know the secrets of my house.

How much have I?

STEWARD. A hundred kegs of gold.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in castles?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in pasture?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in forests?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. Keeping this house alone, sell all I have,

Go barter where you please, but come again

With herds of cattle and with ships of meal.

STEWARD. God's blessing light upon your ladyship.

You will have saved the land.

SELECTED POEMS

CATHLEEN.

Make no delay.

[*He goes.*]

[*ALEEL and OONA return.*]

They have not come; speak quickly.

ALEEL.

One drew his knife,

And said that he would kill the man or woman

That stopped his way; and when I would have stopped
him,

He made this stroke at me, but it is nothing.

CATHLEEN. You shall be tended. From this day
for ever

I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own.

OONA. Their eyes shone like the eyes of birds of
prey.

CATHLEEN. Come, follow me, for the earth burns
my feet

Till I have changed my house to such a refuge

That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,

May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come,

Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.

From this day out I have nothing of my own.

[*She goes.*]

OONA [*taking ALEEL by the arm and as she speaks
bandaging his wound*]. She has found something
now to put her hand to,

And you and I are of no more account

Than flies upon a window-pane in the winter.

[*They go out.*]

SCENE III

SCENE. *Hall in the house of* COUNTESS CATHLEEN.

At the Left an oratory with steps leading up to it. At the Right a tapestried wall, more or less repeating the form of the oratory, and a great chair with its back against the wall. In the Centre are two or more arches through which one can see dimly the trees of the garden. CATHLEEN is kneeling in front of the altar in the oratory. There is a hanging lighted lamp over the altar. ALEEL enters.

ALEEL. I have come to bid you leave this castle and
fly

Out of these woods.

CATHLEEN. What evil is there here,
That is not everywhere from this to the sea?

ALEEL. They who have sent me walk invisible.

CATHLEEN. So it is true what I have heard men say,
That you have seen and heard what others cannot.

ALEEL. I was asleep in my bed, and while I slept
My dream became a fire; and in the fire
One walked, and he had birds about his head.

CATHLEEN. I have heard that one of the old gods
walked so.

ALEEL. It may be that he is angelical;

SELECTED POEMS

And, Lady, he bids me call you from these woods.
And you must bring but your old foster-mother,
And some few serving men, and live in the hills,
Among the sounds of music and the light
Of waters, till the evil days are done.
For here some terrible death is waiting you,
Some unimagined evil, some great darkness
That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon
Scattered.

CATHLEEN. No, not angelical.

ALEEL. This house
You are to leave with some old trusty man,
And bid him shelter all that starve or wander,
While there is food and house room.

CATHLEEN. He bids me go
Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp, when the
trees
Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
And talk among the rustling of the reeds,
When night hunted the foolish sun away
With stillness and pale tapers. No — no — no!
I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep
Because that life would be most happy, and here
I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep
Because I had longed to look upon your face,
But that a night of prayer has made me weary.

ALEEL [*prostrating himself before her*]. Let Him
that made mankind, the angels and devils,
And death and plenty, mend what He has made,

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

For when we labour in vain and eye still sees
Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN. How would that quiet end?

ALEEL. How but in healing?

CATHLEEN. You have seen my tears
And I can see your hand shake on the floor.

ALEEL [*faltering*]. I thought but of healing. He
was angelical.

CATHLEEN. [*turning away from him*]. No, not an-
gelical, but of the old gods,

Who wander about the world to waken the heart —
The passionate proud heart — that all the angels,
Leaving nine heavens empty, would rock to sleep.

[*She goes to chapel door. ALEEL holds his clasped
hands towards her for a moment hesitatingly, and
then lets them fall beside him.*]

CATHLEEN. Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.
This heart shall never waken on earth. I have sworn
By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
To pray before this altar until my heart
Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there
Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

ALEEL [*who has risen*]. When one so great has
spoken of love to one

So little as I, though to deny him love,
What can he but hold out beseeching hands,
Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly
They have overdared?

[*He goes towards the door of the hall. The COUNT-
ESS CATHLEEN takes a few steps towards him.*]

SELECTED POEMS

CATHLEEN. If the old tales are true,
Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar-maids;
God's procreant waters flowing about your mind
Have made you more than kings or queens; and not
 you,
But I am the empty pitcher.

ALEEL. Being silent,
I have said all; yet let me stay beside you.

CATHLEEN. No, no, not while my heart is shaken.
 No,

But you shall hear wind cry and water cry,
And curlews cry, and have the peace I longed for.

ALEEL. Give me your hand to kiss.

CATHLEEN. I kiss your forehead.
And yet I send you from me. Do not speak.
There have been women that bid men to rob
Crowns from the Country-under-Wave, or apples
Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all
That they might sift men's hearts and wills,
And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble
That lay a hard task on you, that you go,
And silently, and do not turn your head;
Good-bye; but do not turn your head and look;
Above all else, I would not have you look.

[ALEEL goes.]

I never spoke about his wounded hand,
And now he is gone.

[She looks out.]

I cannot see him, for all is dark outside.
Would my imagination and my heart

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

Were as little shaken as this holy flame.

[*She goes slowly into the chapel. The distant sound of an alarm bell. The two MERCHANTS enter hurriedly.*]

SECOND MERCHANT. They are ringing the alarm, and in a moment

They'll be upon us.

FIRST MERCHANT [*going to a door at the side*]. Here is the Treasury,

You'd my commands to put them all to sleep.

SECOND MERCHANT. Some angel or else her prayers protected them.

[*Goes into the Treasury and returns with bags of treasure. FIRST MERCHANT has been listening at the oratory door.*]

FIRST MERCHANT. She has fallen asleep.

[*SECOND MERCHANT goes out through one of the arches at the back and stands listening. The bags are at his feet.*]

SECOND MERCHANT. We've all the treasure now,

So let's away before they've tracked us out.

FIRST MERCHANT. I have a plan to win her.

SECOND MERCHANT. You have time enough

If you would kill her and bear off her soul

Before they are upon us with their prayers;

They search the Western Tower.

FIRST MERCHANT. That may not be;

We cannot face the heavenly host in arms;

Her soul must come to us of its own will,

SELECTED POEMS

But being of the ninth and mightiest Hell
Where all are kings, I have a plan to win it.
Lady, we've news that's crying out for speech.

[CATHLEEN *wakes and comes to door of chapel.*]

CATHLEEN. Who calls?

FIRST MERCHANT. We have brought news.

CATHLEEN. What are you?

FIRST MERCHANT. We are merchants, and we know
the book of the world

Because we have walked upon its leaves; and there
Have read of late matters that much concern you;
And noticing the castle door stand open,
Came in to find an ear.

CATHLEEN. The door stands open,
That no one who is famished or afraid,
Despair of help or of a welcome with it.
But you have news, you say?

FIRST MERCHANT. We saw a man,
Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allen,
Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair Head
We saw your grain ships lying all becalmed
In the dark night; and not less still than they,
Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the sea.

CATHLEEN. My thanks to God, to Mary and the
angels,

That I have money in my treasury,
And can buy grain from those who have stored it up
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.
But you've been far and know the signs of things,
When will this yellow vapour no more hang

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

And creep about the fields, and this great heat
Vanish away, and grass show its green shoots?

FIRST MERCHANT. There is no sign of change — day
copies day,

Green things are dead — the cattle too are dead —
Or dying — and on all the vapour hangs,
And fattens with disease and glows with heat.
In you is all the hope of all the land.

CATHLEEN. And heard you of the demons who buy
souls?

FIRST MERCHANT. There are some men who hold
they have wolves' heads,

And say their limbs — dried by the infinite flame —
Have all the speed of storms; others, again,
Say they are gross and little; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled — like us — Lady,
Yet all agree a power is in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting-net
About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor vapours, were it not
You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN. Praise be to God, to Mary, and the
angels

That I am wealthy. Wherefore do they sell?

FIRST MERCHANT. As we came in at the great door,
we saw

Your porter sleeping in his niche — a soul
Too little to be worth a hundred pence
And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns.

SELECTED POEMS

But, for a soul like yours, I heard them say,
They would give five hundred thousand crowns and
more.

CATHLEEN. How can a heap of crowns pay for a
soul?

Is the green grave so terrible a thing?

FIRST MERCHANT. Some sell because the money
gleams, and some

Because they are in terror of the grave,
And some because their neighbours sold before,
And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,
In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind;
To this — full of the gaiety of the lost —
Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN. There is something, Merchant, in your
voice

That makes me fear. When you were telling now
A man may lose his soul and lose his God,
Your eyes were lighted up, and when you told
How my poor money serves the people, both —
Merchants, forgive me — seemed to smile.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Man's sins

Move us to laughter only; we have seen
So many lands and seen so many men,
How strange that all these people should be swung
As on a lady's shoe-string, — under them
The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

CATHLEEN. There is a something in you that I fear
A something not of us; were you not born
In some most distant corner of the world?

[*The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listening at the door, comes forward, and as he comes a sound of voices and feet is heard.*]

SECOND MERCHANT. Away now — they are in the
passage — hurry,

For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts
With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin
With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT. Farewell; for we must ride
Many a mile before the morning come;
Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

[*They go out. A number of PEASANTS enter by other door.*]

FIRST PEASANT. Forgive us, Lady, but we heard a
noise.

SECOND PEASANT. We sat by the fireside telling vani-
ties.

FIRST PEASANT. We heard a noise, but though we
have searched the house,
We have found nobody.

CATHLEEN. You are too timid.
For now you are safe from all the evil times.
There is no evil that can find you here.

OONA [*entering hurriedly*]. Ochone! Ochone!
The treasure room is broken in,
The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

[*PEASANTS raise a lamentable cry.*]

SELECTED POEMS

CATHLEEN. Be silent. [The cry ceases.]
Have you seen nobody?

OONA. Ochone!
That my good mistress should lose all this money.

CATHLEEN. Let those among you — not too old to
ride —
Get horses and search all the country round,
I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

[A man with keys at his girdle has come in while she
speaks. There is a general murmur of "The por-
ter! the porter!"]

PORTER. Demons were here. I sat beside the
door
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

OLD PEASANT. God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN. Old man, old man, He never closed a
door
Unless one opened. I am desolate,
For a most sad resolve wakes in my heart;
But I have still my faith; therefore be silent;
For surely He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age,
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull and shapeless ease;
But sometimes — though His hand is on it still —
It moves awry and demon hordes are born.

[PEASANTS cross themselves.]
Yet leave me now, for I am desolate,

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

[*She comes from the oratory door.*]

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again

I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take

These two — the larder and the dairy keys.

[*To the PORTER.*] But take you this. It opens the
small room

Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore,

Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal.

The book of cures is on the upper shelf.

PORTER. Why do you do this, Lady? Did you see
Your coffin in a dream?

CATHLEEN. Ah, no, not that.

A sad resolve wakes in me. I have heard

A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,

And I must go down, down — I know not where —

Pray for all men and women mad from famine;

Pray, you good neighbours.

[*THE PEASANTS all kneel. COUNTESS CATHLEEN
ascends the steps to the door of the oratory, and turn-
ing round stands there motionless for a little, and
then cries in a loud voice:*]

Mary, Queen of angels,

And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

SCENE IV

SCENE. *A wood near the Castle, as in SCENE II. A group of PEASANTS pass.*

FIRST PEASANT. I have seen silver and copper, but
not gold.

SECOND PEASANT. It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT. It's beautiful.

The most beautiful thing under the sun,
That's what I've heard.

THIRD PEASANT. I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT. I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT. But doesn't a gold piece glitter like
the sun?

That's what my father, who'd seen better days,
Told me when I was but a little boy —
So high, so high — it's shining like the sun,
Round and shining, that is what he said.

SECOND PEASANT. There's nothing in the world it
cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT. They've bags and bags of it.

[*They go out. The two MERCHANTS follow silently.*
Then ALEEL passes over the stage singing.]

ALEEL. Impetuous heart be still, be still,
Your sorrowful love can never be told,

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

Cover it up with a lonely tune.

He who could bend all things to His will

Has covered the door of the infinite fold

With the pale stars and the wandering moon.

SCENE V

SCENE. *The house of SHEMUS RUA. There is an alcove at the back with curtains; in it a bed, and on the bed is the body of MARY with candles round it. The two MERCHANTS, while they speak, put a large book upon a table, arrange money, and so on.*

FIRST MERCHANT. Thanks to that lie I told about
her ships
And that about the herdsman lying sick,
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT. What has she in her coffers
now, but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT. When the night fell and I had
shaped myself
Into the image of the man-headed owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw with all their canvas full of wind
And rushing through the parti-coloured sea
Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal.
They're but three days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT. When the dew rose
I hurried in like feathers to the east,
And saw nine hundred oxen driven through Meath,
With goads of iron. They're but three days from us.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

FIRST MERCHANT. Three days for traffic.

[PEASANTS *crowd in with* TEIG and SHEMUS.]

SHEMUS. Come in, come in, you are welcome.
That is my wife. She mocked at my great masters,
And would not deal with them. Now there she is;
She does not even know she was a fool,
So great a fool she was.

TEIG. She would not eat
One crumb of bread bought with our master's money,
But lived on nettles, dock, and dandelion.

SHEMUS. There's nobody could put into her head
That Death is the worst thing can happen us;
Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank
With all the lies that she had heard in chapel.
Draw to the curtain. [TEIG *draws it.*] You'll not
play the fool
While these good gentlemen are here to save you.

SECOND MERCHANT. Since the drought came they
drift about in a throng,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds.
Come, deal — come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT. Who will come deal with us?

SHEMUS. They are out of spirit, sir, with lack of
food,
Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these;
The others will gain courage in good time.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I come to deal — if you give
honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading in a book*]. "John
Maher, a man of substance, with dull mind,

SELECTED POEMS

And quiet senses and unventurous heart.
The angels think him safe." Two hundred crowns,
All for a soul, a little breath of wind.

THE MAN. I ask three hundred crowns. You have
read there

That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is something more writ
here—"Often at night

He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor,
And thereon wonders if there's any man
That he could rob in safety."

A PEASANT. Who'd have thought it?
And I was once alone with him at midnight.

ANOTHER PEASANT. I will not trust my mother after
this.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is this crack in you — two
hundred crowns.

A PEASANT. That's plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT. I'd give him nothing.

SHEMUS. You'll get no more — so take what's of-
fered you.

[*A general murmur, during which MIDDLE-AGED MAN
takes money, and slips into background, where he
sinks on to a seat.*]

FIRST MERCHANT. Has no one got a better soul than
that?

If but for credit of your parishes,
Traffic with us.

A WOMAN. What will you give for mine?

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading in book*]. "Soft, handsome, and still young — not much, I think. It's certain that the man she's married to Knows nothing of what's hidden in the jar Between the hour-glass and the pepper-pot."

THE WOMAN. The scandalous book!

FIRST MERCHANT. "Nor how when he's away At the horse fair the hand that wrote what's hid Will tap three times upon the window pane."

THE WOMAN. And if there is a letter, that is no reason

Why I should have less money than the others.

FIRST MERCHANT. You're almost safe, I give you fifty crowns.

[*She turns to go.*]

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS. Woman, have sense — come, come. Is this a time to haggle at the price?

There, take it up. There, there. That's right.

[*She takes them and goes into the crowd.*]

FIRST MERCHANT. Come, deal, deal, deal. It is but for charity

We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins

Made them our Master's long before we came.

[*ALEEL enters.*]

ALEEL. Here, take my soul, for I am tired of it.

I do not ask a price.

SHEMUS. Not ask a price?

How can you sell your soul without a price?

I would not listen to his broken wits;

His love for Countess Cathleen has so crazed him,

SELECTED POEMS

He hardly understands what he is saying.

ALEEL. The trouble that has come on Countess Cathleen,

The sorrow that is in her wasted face,
The burden in her eyes, have broke my wits,
And yet I know I'd have you take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL. No, but you must. Seeing it cannot help her,

I have grown tired of it.

FIRST MERCHANT. Begone from me!

I may not touch it.

ALEEL. Is your power so small?

And must I bear it with me all my days?

May you be scorned and mocked!

FIRST MERCHANT. Drag him away.

He troubles me.

[TEIG and SHEMUS lead ALEEL into the crowd.]

SECOND MERCHANT. His gaze has filled me, brother,
With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT. Lean forward

And kiss the circlet where my Master's lips
Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither;
You shall have peace once more.

[SECOND MERCHANT kisses the gold circlet that is about the head of the FIRST MERCHANT.]

I, too, grow weary,
But there is something moving in my heart
Whereby I know that what we seek the most

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

Is drawing near — our labour will soon end.

Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; are you all dumb?

What, will you keep me from our ancient home,

And from the eternal revelry?

SECOND MERCHANT. Deal, deal.

SHEMUS. They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT. I offer this great price: a thousand crowns

For an old woman who was always ugly.

[*An old PEASANT WOMAN comes forward, and he takes up a book and reads:*]

There is but little set down here against her.

"She has stolen eggs and fowl when times were bad,

But when the times grew better has confessed it;

She never missed her chapel of a Sunday,

And when she could, paid dues." Take up your money.

OLD WOMAN. God bless you, sir. [*She screams.*]

Oh, sir, a pain went through me!

FIRST MERCHANT. That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

[*Murmur among the PEASANTS, who shrink back from her as she goes out.*]

A PEASANT. How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT. And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT. I tell you there is no such place as Hell.

FIRST MERCHANT. Can such a trifle turn you from your profit?

Come, deal; come, deal.

SELECTED POEMS

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT. I bought your soul, and there's
no sense in fear

Now the soul's gone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Give me my soul again.

WOMAN [*going on her knees and clinging to MERCHANT*]. And take this money too, and give me
mine.

SECOND MERCHANT. Bear bastards, drink, or follow
some wild fancy;

For sighs and cries are the soul's work,

And you have none. [*Throws the woman off.*]

PEASANT. Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Come quickly; if that woman
had not screamed,

I would have lost my soul.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Come, come away.

[*They turn to door, but are stopped by shouts of*
"COUNTRESS CATHLEEN! COUNTRESS CATH-
LEEN!"

CATHLEEN [*entering*]. And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT. In spite of you.

What brings you here, saint with the sapphire eyes?

CATHLEEN. I come to barter a soul for a great price.

SECOND MERCHANT. What matter, if the soul be
worth the price.

CATHLEEN. The people starve, therefore the people
go

Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them,

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

And it is in my ears by night and day,
And I would have five hundred thousand crowns
That I may feed them till the dearth go by.

FIRST MERCHANT. It may be the soul's worth it.

CATHLEEN. There is more:
The souls that you have bought must be set free.

FIRST MERCHANT. We know of but one soul that's
worth the price.

CATHLEEN. Being my own, it seems a priceless thing.

SECOND MERCHANT. You offer us —

CATHLEEN. I offer my own soul.

A PEASANT. Do not, do not, for souls the like of
ours

Are not precious to God as your soul is.

O! What would Heaven do without you, lady?

ANOTHER PEASANT. Look how their claws clutch in
their leathern gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT. Five hundred thousand crowns;
we give the price.

The gold is here; the souls, even while you speak,
Have slipped out of our bond, because your face
Has shed a light on them and filled their hearts.
But you must sign, for we omit no form
In buying a soul like yours.

SECOND MERCHANT. Sign with this quill. It was
a feather growing on the cock

That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
And all who use it have great honour in Hell.

[CATHLEEN leans forward to sign.]

ALEEL [*rushing forward and snatching the parchment*

SELECTED POEMS

from her]. Leave all things to the builder of the heavens.

CATHLEEN. I have no thoughts; I hear a cry — a cry.

ALEEL [*casting the parchment on the ground*]. I have seen a vision under a green hedge,

A hedge of hips and haws — men yet shall hear
The Archangels rolling Satan's empty skull
Over the mountain tops.

FIRST MERCHANT. Take him away.

[*TEIG and SHEMUS drag him roughly away so that he falls upon the floor among the PEASANTS. CATHLEEN picks up parchment and signs, then turns towards the PEASANTS.*]

CATHLEEN. Take up the money, and now come with me;

When we are far from this polluted place

I will give everybody money enough.

[*She goes out, the PEASANTS crowding round her and kissing her dress. ALEEL and the two MERCHANTS are left alone.*]

SECOND MERCHANT. We must away and wait until she dies,

Sitting above her tower as two grey owls,

Waiting as many years as may be, guarding

Our precious jewel; waiting to seize her soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We need but hover over her head in the air,

For she has only minutes. When she signed

Her heart began to break. Hush, hush, I hear

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

The brazen door of Hell move on its hinges,
And the eternal revelry float hither
To hearten us.

SECOND MERCHANT. Leap feathered on the air
And meet them with her soul caught in your claws.

[THEY rush out. ALEEL crawls into the middle of
the room. The twilight has fallen and gradually
darkens as the scene goes on. There is a distant
muttering of thunder and a sound of rising storm.]

ALEEL. The brazen door stands wide, and Balor
comes

Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted
The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of old
Turned gods to stone; Barach, the traitor, comes;
And the lascivious race, Cailitin,
That cast a druid weakness and decay
Over Sualtem's and old Dectera's child;
And that great king Hell first took hold upon
When he killed Naisi and broke Deirdre's heart,
And all their heads are twisted to one side,
For when they lived they warred on beauty and peace
With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness.

[OONA enters.]

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA. Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this
day

Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand it trembled,
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL. Cathleen has chosen other friends than us.

SELECTED POEMS

Demons are out, old heron.

OONA. God guard her soul.

ALEEL. She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.
And they are rising through the hollow world.

[*He points downwards.*]

First, Orchill, her pale, beautiful head alive,
Her body shadowy as vapour drifting
Under the dawn, for she who awoke desire
Has but a heart of blood when others die;
About her is a vapoury multitude
Of women alluring devils with soft laughter
Behind her a host heat of the blood made sin,
But all the little pink-white nails have grown
To be great talons.

[*He seizes OONA and drags her into the middle of the room and points downward with vehement gestures. The wind roars.*]

They begin a song,
And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA [*casting herself face downward on the floor*].
O, Maker of all, protect her from the demons,
And if a soul must need be lost, take mine.

[ALEEL kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.]

OONA. O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

[*She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.*]

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

A PEASANT. We were under the tree where the path
turns,

When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

And while we bore her hither, cloudy gusts

Blackened the world and shook us on our feet;

Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld

So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

[*One who is near the door draws the bolt.*]

CATHLEEN. O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the
storm

Is dragging me away.

[*OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.*]

PEASANT. Hush!

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

CATHLEEN [*half rising*]. Lay all the bags of money
in a heap,

And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out

To every man and woman: judge, and give

According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN. And will she give

Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. O, Queen of Heaven,
and all you blessed saints,

Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN. Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;

I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes

Upon the nest under the eave, before

SELECTED POEMS

She wander the loud waters. Do not weep
Too great a while, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar, though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me,
And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child and therefore happy,
Therefore happy, even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair, and I must go.

[*She dies.*]

OONA. Bring me the looking-glass.

[*A WOMAN brings it to her out of the inner room,
OONA holds it over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is
silent for a moment. And then she speaks in a half
scream.*]

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT. She was the great white lily of the
world.

A PEASANT. She was more beautiful than the pale
stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN. The little plant I loved
is broken in two.

[*ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it
upon the floor so that it is broken in many pieces.*]

ALEEL. I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more:
And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful words
Made you a living spirit has passed away

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

And left you but a ball of passionate dust,
And you, proud earth and plummy sea, fade out!
For you may hear no more her faltering feet,
But are left lonely amid the clamorous war
Of angels upon devils.

*[He stands up; almost every one is kneeling, but it has
grown so dark that only confused forms can be seen.]*

And I who weep

Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change,
And have no excellent hope but the great hour
When you shall plunge headlong through bottomless
space.

[A flash of lightning followed immediately by thunder.]

A PEASANT WOMAN. Pull him upon his knees before
his curses

Have plucked thunder and lightning on our heads.

ALEEL. Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.

*[A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.]*

Yonder a bright spear, cast out of a sling,
Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark clans
Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.

[Everything is lost in darkness.]

AN OLD MAN. The Almighty wrath at our great
weakness and sin

Has blotted out the world, and we must die.

*[The darkness is broken by a visionary light. The
PEASANTS seem to be kneeling upon the rocky slope
of a mountain, and vapour full of storm and ever-*

SELECTED POEMS

changing light is sweeping above them and behind them. Half in the light, half in the shadow, stand armed angels; their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dinted. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The PEASANTS cast themselves on the ground.]

ALEEL. Look no more on the half closed gates of Hell,

But speak to me, whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things,
And tell of her who lies there.

[He seizes one of the ANGELS.]

Till you speak,

You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL. The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide,

And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

[ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.]

OONA. Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace

That I would die and go to her I love;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

[*A sound of far-off horns seems to come from the heart of the Light. The vision melts away, and the forms of the kneeling PEASANTS appear faintly in the darkness.*]

LYRICS
(1892-1899)

THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare;
Caolte tossing his burning hair
And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a-gleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;
And if any gaze on our rushing band,
We come between him and the deed of his hand,
We come between him and the hope of his heart.
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,
And where is there hope or deed as fair?
Caolte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away.*

THE EVERLASTING VOICES

O sweet everlasting voices be still;
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold
And bid them wander obeying your will
Flame under flame, till Time be no more;
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
O sweet everlasting Voices be still.

THE MOODS

Time drops in decay,
Like a candle burnt out,
And the mountains and woods
Have their day, have their day;
What one in the rout
Of the fire-born moods,
Has fallen away?

THE LOVER TELLS OF THE ROSE IN HIS HEART

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and
old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumber-
ing cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry
mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the
depths of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to
be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll
apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, remade, like a
casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the
depths of my heart.

INTO THE TWILIGHT

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
Laugh heart again in the grey twilight,
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,
Dew ever shining and twilight grey;
Though hope fall from you and love decay,
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:
For there the mystical brotherhood
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood
And river and stream work out their will;

And God stands winding His lonely horn,
And time and the world are ever in flight;
And love is less kind than the grey twilight,
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

THE HEART OF THE WOMAN

O what to me the little room
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;
He bade me out into the gloom,
And my breast lies upon his breast.

O what to me my mother's care,
The house where I was safe and warm;
The shadowy blossom of my hair
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

O hiding hair and dewy eyes,
I am no more with life and death,
My heart upon his warm heart lies,
My breath is mixed into his breath.

HE MOURNS FOR THE CHANGE THAT HAS
COME UPON HIM AND HIS BELOVED
AND LONGS FOR THE END OF THE
WORLD

Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns!
I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;
I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of
Thorns,
For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and fear
Under my feet that they follow you night and day.
A man with a hazel wand came without sound;
He changed me suddenly; I was looking another way;
And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;
And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.
I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the
West
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the
sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his
rest.

HE BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE

I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,
Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering
white;

The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,
The East her hidden joy before the morning break,
The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,
The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire:
O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay:
Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous
feet.

HE REPROVES THE CURLEW

O, curlew, cry no more in the air,
Or only to the waters in the West;
Because your crying brings to my mind
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
That was shaken out over my breast:
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY

When my arms wrap you round I press
My heart upon the loveliness
That has long faded from the world;
The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled
In shadowy pools, when armies fled;
The love-tales wrought with silken thread
By dreaming ladies upon cloth
That has made fat the murderous moth;
The roses that of old time were
Woven by ladies in their hair,
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
Through many a sacred corridor
Where such grey clouds of incense rose
That only the gods' eyes did not close:
For that pale breast and lingering hand
Come from a more dream-heavy land,
A more dream-heavy hour than this;
And when you sigh from kiss to kiss
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,
For hours when all must fade like dew
But flame on flame, deep under deep,
Throne over throne, where in half sleep
Their swords upon their iron knees
Brood her high lonely mysteries.

HE GIVES HIS BELOVED CERTAIN RHYMES

Fasten your hair with a golden pin,
And bind up every wandering tress;
I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:
It worked at them, day out, day in,
Building a sorrowful loveliness
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,
And bind up your long hair and sigh;
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;
And candle-like foam on the dim sand,
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,
Live but to light your passing feet.

TO MY HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE
NO FEAR

Be you still, be you still, trembling heart;
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:
*Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,
And the winds that blow through the starry ways,
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood
Cover over and hide, for he has no part
With the proud, majestic multitude.*

THE CAP AND BELLS

The jester walked in the garden:
The garden had fallen still;
He bade his soul rise upward
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,
When owls began to call:
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming,
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air.

THE CAP AND BELLS

"I have cap and bells," he pondered,
"I will send them to her and die;"
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,
Under a cloud of her hair,
And her red lips sang them a love song:
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,
And the heart and the soul came through,
To her right hand came the red one,
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,
A chattering wise and sweet,
And her hair was a folded flower
And the quiet of love in her feet.

THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK PIG

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown
spears

Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
We who still labour by the cromlec on the shore,
The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in
dew,

Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you
Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.

THE LOVER ASKS FORGIVENESS BE-
CAUSE OF HIS MANY MOODS

If this importunate heart trouble your peace
With words lighter than air,
Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and cease;
Crumple the rose in your hair;
And cover your lips with odorous twilight and say,
"O Hearts of wind-blown flame!
O Winds, elder than changing of night and day,
That murmuring and longing came,
From marble cities loud with tabors of old
In dove-grey faery lands;
From battle banners fold upon purple fold,
Queens wrought with glimmering hands;
That saw young Niamh hover with love-lorn face
Above the wandering tide;
And lingered in the hidden desolate place,
Where the last Phœnix died
And wrapped the flames above his holy head;
And still murmur and long:
O Piteous Hearts, changing till change be dead
In a tumultuous song:"
And cover the pale blossoms of your breast
With your dim heavy hair,
And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest
The odorous twilight there.

HE TELLS OF THE PERFECT BEAUTY

O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes
The poets labouring all their days
To build a perfect beauty in rhyme
Are overthrown by a woman's gaze
And by the unlabouring brood of the skies:
And therefore my heart will bow, when dew
Is dropping sleep, until God burn time,
Before the unlabouring stars and you.

HE HEARS THE CRY OF THE SEDGE

I wander by the edge
Of this desolate lake
Where wind cries in the sedge
Until the axle break
That keeps the stars in their round,
And hands hurl in the deep
The banners of East and West,
And the girdle of light is unbound,
Your breast will not lie by the breast
Of your beloved in sleep.

THE TRAVAIL OF PASSION

When the flaming lute-thronged angelic door is wide
When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay;
Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the
way

Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side
The vinegar-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kidron stream
We will bend down and loosen our hair over you,
That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew
Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.

THE LOVER PLEADS WITH HIS
FRIEND FOR OLD FRIENDS

Though you are in your shining days,
Voices among the crowd
And new friends busy with your praise,
Be not unkind or proud,
But think about old friends the most:
Time's bitter flood will rise,
Your beauty perish and be lost
For all eyes but these eyes.

HE WISHES HIS BELOVED WERE DEAD

Were you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;
And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead:
Nor would you rise and hasten away,
Though you have the will of the wild birds,
But know your hair was bound and wound
About the stars and moon and sun:
O would, beloved, that you lay
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,
While lights were paling one by one.

HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE
(1903)

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE

Maeve the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone,
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.

O unquiet heart,

Why do you praise another, praising her,

SELECTED POEMS

As if there were no tale but your own tale
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen
Who has been buried some two thousand years?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;
And wondering who of the many changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall, being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate.
The porter slept, although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise
Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs
More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE

She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,
Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice
Of those that it may be can never age.
He said, "High Queen of Cruachan and Magh Ai,
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you."
And with glad voice Maeve answered him, "What King
Of the far wandering shadows has come to me?
As in the old days when they would come and go
About my threshold to counsel and to help."
The parted lips replied, "I seek your help,
For I am Aengus, and I am crossed in love."

"How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that wander with hand clasping hand,

SELECTED POEMS

Their haughty images, that cannot wither
For all their beauty's like a hollow dream,
Mirrored in streams that neither hail nor rain
Nor the cold North has troubled?"

He replied:

"I am from those rivers and I bid you call
The children of the Maines out of sleep,
And set them digging into Anbual's hill.
We shadows, while they uproot his earthy house,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue-eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls,
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan."

"I obey your will

With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck."
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,
Came to the threshold of the painted house,
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.

She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE

To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror stricken faces,
Till Maeve called out: "These are but common men.
The Maines' children have not dropped their spades,
Because Earth, crazy for its broken power,
Casts up a show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows." Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
'Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.

Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you;
And when I've heard how they grew old and died,
Or fell into unhappiness, I've said:
"She will grow old and die, and she has wept!"
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.

SELECTED POEMS

I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one,
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings,
Said: "Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace."
Then Maeve: "O Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high talk
With the first kings of many pillared Cruachan.
O when will you grow weary?"
They had vanished;
But out of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

BAILE AND AILLINN
(1903)

BAILE AND AILLINN

ARGUMENT. *Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.*

I hardly hear the curlew cry,
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,
Baile, who had the honey mouth;
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their bodies had grown old.
Being forbid to marry on earth,
They blossomed to immortal mirth.

About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band

SELECTED POEMS

Of harpers and young men; and they
Imagined, as they struck the way
To many pastured Muirthemne,
That all things fell out happily,
And there, for all that fools had said,
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.
They found an old man running there:
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
He had puddle water in his shoes;
He had half a cloak to keep him dry,
Although he had a squirrel's eye.

*O wandering birds and rushy beds,
You put such folly in our heads
With all this crying in the wind;
No common love is to our mind,
And our poor Kate or Nan is less
Than any whose unhappiness
Awoke the harp-strings long ago.
Yet they that know all things but know
That all life had to give us is
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.
Who was it put so great a scorn
In the grey reeds that night and morn
Are trodden and broken by the herds,
And in the light bodies of birds
That north wind tumbles to and fro
And pinches among hail and snow?*

BAILE AND AILLINN

That runner said: " I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,
To tell him how the girl Aillinn
Rode from the country of her kin,
An old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With: ' You must home again, and wed
With somebody in your own land.'
A young man cried and kissed her hand,
' O lady, wed with one of us; '
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake,
She fell and died of the heart-break."

Because a lover's heart's worn out,
Being tumbled and blown about
By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he being laid upon green boughs,
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Ulad sat before
The brazen pillars of his door,

SELECTED POEMS

His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend.
For although years had passed away
He always wept them on that day,
For on that day they had been betrayed;
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
Under a cairn of sleepy stone
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
Although he is carrying stone, but two
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

*We hold because our memory is
So full of that thing and of this
That out of sight is out of mind.
But the grey rush under the wind
And the grey bird with crooked bill
Have such long memories, that they still
Remember Deirdre and her man;
And when we walk with Kate or Nan
About the windy water side,
Our heart can hear the voices chide.
How could we be so soon content,
Who know the way that Naoise went?
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,
Who being lovely was so wise —
Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.*

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
Gathering his cloak about him, run
Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids,
Who amid leafy lights and shades

BAILE AND AILLINN

Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
Their bodices in some dim place
When they had come to the marriage bed;
And harpers, pondering with bowed head
A music that had thought enough
Of the ebb of all things to make love
Grow gentle without sorrowings;
And leather-coated men with slings
Who peered about on every side;
And amid leafy light he cried:
"He is well out of wind and wave;
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne, and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ —

Baile, that was of Rury's seed.

But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn's marriage bed,
For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes."

And hurrying to the south, he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because
Some god or king had made the laws
That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.

SELECTED POEMS

That old man climbed ; the day grew dim ;
Two swans came flying up to him,
Linked by a gold chain each to each,
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.

They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp-strings
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

What shall I call them? fish that swim,
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water-lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,
Or the door pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran.
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end,
Because they have made so good a friend.

They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias,

BAILE AND AILLINN

And Findrias and Falias,
And long-forgotten Murias,
Among the giant kings whose hoard
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword
Was robbed before Earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is,
And tremble with their love and kiss.
They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.

What were our praise to them: they eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat,
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat,
Far out under a windless sky;
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow,
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.

And poets found, old writers say,
A yew tree where his body lay;
But a wild apple hid the grass

SELECTED POEMS

With its sweet blossom where hers was;
And being in good heart, because
A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,
And that long fighting at the ford,
They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.

*Let rush and bird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her.
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she,
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two; for never yet
Has lover lived, but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive.*

LYRICS
(1899-1904)

THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

One that is ever kind said yesterday:
"Your well beloved's hair has threads of grey,
And little shadows come about her eyes;
Time can but make it easier to be wise,
Though now it's hard, till trouble is at an end;
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend."
But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain;
Time can but make her beauty over again,
Because of that great nobleness of hers;
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways,
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.
O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,
You'd know the folly of being comforted.

OLD MEMORY

O thought fly to her when the end of day
Awakens an old memory, and say,
"Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,
It might call up a new age, calling to mind
The queens that were imagined long ago,
Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough
Through the long years of youth, and who would have
thought
It all, and more than it all, would come to naught,
And that dear words meant nothing?" But enough,
For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love:
Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said
That would be harsh for children that have strayed.

NEVER GIVE ALL THE HEART

Never give all the heart, for love
Will hardly seem worth thinking of
To passionate women, if it seem
Certain, and they never dream
That it fades out from kiss to kiss;
For everything that's lovely is
But a brief dreamy kind delight.
O never give the heart outright
For they, for all smooth lips can say,
Have given their hearts up to the play.
And who could play it well enough
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?
He that made this knows all the cost
For he gave all his heart and lost.

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds,
"Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
For the roads are unending, and there is no place to my
mind."

The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill,
And I fell asleep upon lonely Echtge of streams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them my
dreams.

I know of the leafy paths that the witches take,
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles
of wool,
And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan kind
Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows cool
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam
gleams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them my
dreams.

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
Coupled with golden chains, and sing as they fly.
A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound
Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so
blind

With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone
by;

I know, and the curlew and peewit on Eights of streams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them my
dreams.

UNDER THE MOON

I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde,
Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,
Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a
while;
Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind,
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart;
Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and
the sun's
Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long-lived ones;
Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates
apart,
And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn,
To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier:
Therein are many queens like Branwen and Guinivere;
And Niamh and Laban and Fand, who could change to
an otter or fawn,
And the wood-woman, whose lover was changed to a
blue-eyed hawk;
And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun, or
shore,
Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,
I hear the harp-string praise them, or hear their mournful
talk.

UNDER THE MOON

Because of a story I heard under the thin horn
Of the third moon, that hung between the night and the
day,

To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

ADAM'S CURSE

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.

I said: "A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

That woman then
Murmured with her young voice, for whose mild sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
In finding that it's young and mild and low:
"There is one thing that all we women know,
Although we never heard of it at school —
That we must labour to be beautiful."

ADAM'S CURSE

I said: "It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears;
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old highway of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary hearted as that hollow moon.

RED HANRAHAN'S SONG ABOUT IRELAND

The old brown thorn trees break in two high over Cummen Strand,
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea,
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can say.
Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat;
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare,
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES IN THE WATER

I heard the old, old men say,
“ Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away.”
They had hands like claws, and their knees
Were twisted like the old thorn trees
By the waters.
I heard the old, old men say,
“ All that’s beautiful drifts away
Like the waters.”

THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

There's many a strong farmer
Whose heart would break in two,
If he could see the townland
That we were riding to;
Boughs have their fruit and blossom
At all times of the year;
Rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer.
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a golden and silver wood;
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,
Are dancing in the crowd.
The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

When their hearts are so high
That they would come to blows,
They unhook their heavy swords
From golden and silver boughs;

THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

But all that are killed in battle
Awaken to life again:
It is lucky that their story
Is not known among men.
For O, the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie,
Their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

Michael will unhook his trumpet
From a bough overhead,
And blow a little noise
When the supper has been spread.
Gabriel will come from the water
With a fish tail, and talk
Of wonders that have happened
On wet roads where men walk,
And lift up an old horn
Of hammered silver, and drink
Till he has fallen asleep
Upon the starry brink.

SELECTED POEMS

The little fox he murmured,
" O what of the world's bane? "
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
" O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

ON BAILE'S STRAND

(1904)

ON BAILE'S STRAND

SCENE. *A great hall at Dundevalgan, not "Cuchulain's great ancient house" but an assembly house nearer to the sea. A big door at the back, and through the door misty light as of sea mist. There are many chairs and one long bench. One of these chairs, which is towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others. Somewhere at the back there is a table with flagons of ale upon it and drinking horns. There is a small door at one side of the hall. A FOOL and BLIND MAN, both ragged, come in through the door at the back. The BLIND MAN leans upon a staff.*

FOOL. What a clever man you are though you are blind! There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are. Who but you could have thought that the hen wife sleeps every day a little at noon? I would never be able to steal anything if you didn't tell me where to look for it. And what a good cook you are! You take the fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it and plucked it, and you put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite, and when I've got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me, done to the turn.

SELECTED POEMS

BLIND MAN [*who is feeling about with his stick*].
Done to the turn.

FOOL [*putting his arm round BLIND MAN's neck*].
Come now, I'll have a leg and you'll have a leg, and we'll draw lots for the wishbone. I'll be praising you, I'll be praising you, while we're eating it, for your good plans and for your good cooking. There's nobody in the world like you, Blind Man. Come, come. Wait a minute. I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't like them not to find me. Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me. Boann herself out of the river and Fand out of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, "Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss," that's what they cry. That's wide enough. All the witches can come in now. I wouldn't have them beat at the door and say: "Where's the Fool? Why has he put a lock on the door?" Maybe they'll hear the bubbling of the pot and come in and sit on the ground. But we won't give them any of the fowl. Let them go back to the sea, let them go back to the sea.

BLIND MAN [*feeling legs of big chair with his hands*].
Ha! [*Then, in a louder voice as he feels the back of it.*]
Ah! ah!

FOOL. Why do you say A-h!

BLIND MAN. I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King is coming. They have brought out his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he's coming for.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

FOOL. He must be a great man to be Cuchulain's master.

BLIND MAN. So he is. He is a great man. He is over all the rest of the kings of Ireland.

FOOL. Cuchulain's master! I thought Cuchulain could do anything he liked.

BLIND MAN. So he did, so he did. But he ran too wild, and Conchobar is coming to-day to put an oath upon him that will stop his rambling and make him as biddable as a house dog and keep him always at his hand. He will sit in this chair and put the oath upon him.

FOOL. How will he do that?

BLIND MAN. You have no wits to understand such things. [*The BLIND MAN has got into the chair.*] He will sit up in this chair and he'll say: "Take the oath, Cuchulain. I bid you take the oath. Do as I tell you. What are your wits compared with mine, and what are your riches compared with mine? And what sons have you to pay your debts and and to put a stone over you when you die? Take the oath, I tell you. Take a strong oath."

FOOL [*crumpling himself up and whining*]. I will not. I'll take no oath. I want my dinner.

BLIND MAN. Hush, hush! It is not done yet.

FOOL. You said it was done to a turn.

BLIND MAN. Did I now? Well, it might be done, and not done. The wings might be white, but the legs might be red. The flesh might stick hard to the bones and not come away in the teeth. But, believe me, Fool, it will be well done before you put your teeth in it.

SELECTED POEMS

FOOL. My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

BLIND MAN. I'll tell you a story — the kings have story-tellers while they are waiting for their dinner — I will tell you a story with a fight in it, a story with a champion in it, and a ship and a queen's son that has his mind set on killing somebody that you and I know.

FOOL. Who is that? Who is he coming to kill?

BLIND MAN. Wait now till you hear. When you were stealing the fowl, I was lying in a hole in the sand, and I heard three men coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning.

FOOL. Go on. Tell me about the fight.

BLIND MAN. There had been a fight, a great fight, a tremendous great fight. A young man had landed on the shore, the guardians of the shore had asked his name, and he had refused to tell it, and he had killed one, and others had run away.

FOOL. That's enough. Come on now to the fowl. I wish it was bigger. I wish it was as big as a goose . . .

BLIND MAN. Hush! I haven't told you all. I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he had come from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain.

FOOL. Nobody can do that.

Cuchulain has killed kings,

Kings and sons of kings,

Dragons out of the water,

And witches out of the air,

Banachas and Bonachas and people of the woods.

BLIND MAN. Hush! hush!

ON BAILE'S STRAND

FOOL. Witches that steal the milk,
Fomor that steal the children,
Hags that have heads like hares,
Hares that have claws like witches,
All riding a cock horse

Out of the very bottom of the bitter black north.

BLIND MAN. Hush, I say!

FOOL. Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him?

BLIND MAN. How would he know that with his head in the clouds? He doesn't care for common fighting. Why would he put himself out, and nobody in it but a young man? Now if it were a white fawn that might turn into a queen before morning . . .

FOOL. Come to the fowl . . . I wish it was as big as a pig . . . a fowl with goose grease and pig's crackling.

BLIND MAN. No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you,—a secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets.

FOOL. Tell me the secret.

BLIND MAN. That young man is Aoife's son. I am sure it is Aoife's son, it is borne in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman-fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the north.

FOOL. I know, I know. She is one of those cross queens that lives in hungry Scotland.

BLIND MAN. I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

SELECTED POEMS

FOOL. That was before you were blinded for putting a curse upon the wind.

BLIND MAN. There was a boy in her house that had her own red colour on him and everybody said he was to be brought up to kill Cuchulain, that she hated Cuchulain. She used to put a helmet on a pillar-stone and call it Cuchulain and set him casting at it. There is a step outside — Cuchulain's step. [CUCHULAIN *passes by in the mist outside the big door.*]

FOOL. Where is Cuchulain going?

BLIND MAN. He is going to meet Conchobar that has bidden him to take the oath.

FOOL. Ah, an oath, Blind Man. How can I remember so many things at once? Who is going to take an oath?

BLIND MAN. Cuchulain is going to take an oath to Conchobar who is High King.

FOOL. What a mix-up you make of everything, Blind Man. You were telling me one story, and now you are telling me another story . . . How can I get the hang of it at the end if you mix everything at the beginning? Wait till I settle it out. There now, there's Cuchulain [*he points to one foot*], and there is the young man [*he points to the other foot*] that is coming to kill him, and Cuchulain doesn't know, but where's Conchobar? [*Takes bag from side.*] That's Conchobar with all his riches — Cuchulain, young man, Conchobar — And where's Aoife? [*Throws up cap.*] There is Aoife, high up on the mountains in high hungry Scotland. Maybe it is not true after all. Maybe it was your own making

ON BAILE'S STRAND

up. It's many a time you cheated me before with your lies. Come to the cooking pot, my stomach is pinched and rusty. Would you have it to be creaking like a gate?

BLIND MAN. I tell you it's true. And more than that is true. If you listen to what I say, you'll forget your stomach . . .

FOOL. I won't.

BLIND MAN. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say. I would be afraid to say. Ah, Fool, you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is.

FOOL. Who is it? Tell me now quick, or I'll shake you. Come, out with it, or I'll shake you.

BLIND MAN. Wait, wait. There's somebody coming. It is Cuchulain is coming. He's coming back with the High King. Go and ask Cuchulain. He'll tell you. It's little you'll care about the cooking pot when you have asked Cuchulain that . . .

FOOL. I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. [*Goes up stage.*] I'll ask him. [*Turns and goes down stage.*] But, no. I won't ask him, I would be afraid. [*Going up again.*] Yes, I will ask him. What harm in asking? The Blind Man said I was to ask him. [*Going down.*] No, no. I'll not ask him. He might kill me. I have but killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed kings. [*Goes up again almost to big door.*] Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid. I'm no coward. I'll ask him. No, no, Cuchulain, I'm not going to ask you.

SELECTED POEMS

He has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,

Banachas and Bonachas and people of the woods.

[FOOL *goes out side door, the last words being heard outside.*]

[CUCHULAIN *and CONCHOBAR enter through the big door at back. While they are still outside, CUCHULAIN'S voice is heard raised in anger. He is a dark man, something over forty years of age. CONCHOBAR is much older and carries a long staff, elaborately carved, or with an elaborate gold handle.*]

CUCHULAIN. Because I have killed men without your bidding

And have rewarded others at my own pleasure,

Because of half a score of trifling things

You'd lay this oath upon me, and now and now

You add another pebble to the heap.

And I must be your man, well-nigh your bondsman,

Because a youngster out of Aoife's country

Has found the shore ill guarded.

CONCHOBAR.

He came to land

While you were somewhere out of sight and hearing,

Hunting or dancing with your wild companions.

CUCHULAIN. He can be driven out. I'll not be bound.

I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love;

Wherever and whenever I've a mind to.

If time had not put water in your blood,

ON BAILE'S STRAND

You never would have thought it.

CONCHOBAR.

I would leave

A strong and settled country to my children.

CUCHULAIN. And I must be obedient in all things;

Give up my will to yours; go where you please;

Come when you call; sit at the council-board

Among the unshapely bodies of old men.

I whose mere name has kept this country safe,

I that in early days have driven out

Maeve of Cruachan and the northern pirates,

The hundred kings of SORCHA, and the kings

Out of the garden in the east of the world.

Must I, that held you on the throne when all

Had pulled you from it, swear obedience

As if I were some cattle-raising king?

Are my shins speckled with the heat of the fire,

Or have my hands no skill but to make figures

Upon the ashes with a stick? Am I

So slack and idle that I need a whip

Before I serve you?

CONCHOBAR.

No, no whip, Cuchulain,

But every day my children come and say

This man is growing harder to endure.

How can we be at safety with this man

That nobody can buy or bid or bind?

We shall be at his mercy when you are gone;

He burns the earth as if he were a fire,

And time can never touch him.

CUCHULAIN.

And so the tale

Grows finer yet; and I am to obey

SELECTED POEMS

Whatever child you set upon the throne,
As if it were yourself.

CONCHOBAR.

Most certainly.

I am High King, my son shall be High King.
And you for all the wildness of your blood,
And though your father came out of the sun,
Are but a little king and weigh but light
In anything that touches government,
If put into the balance with my children.

CUCHULAIN. It's well that we should speak our minds
out plainly,

For when we die we shall be spoken of
In many countries. We in our young days
Have seen the heavens like a burning cloud
Brooding upon the world, and being more
Than men can be now that cloud's lifted up,
We should be the more truthful. Conchobar,
I do not like your children — they have no pith,
No marrow, in their bones, and will lie soft
Where you and I lie hard.

CONCHOBAR.

You rail at them

Because you have no children of your own.

CUCHULAIN. I think myself most lucky that I leave
No pallid ghost or mockery of a man
To drift and mutter in the corridors,
Where I have laughed and sung.

CONCHOBAR.

That is not true

For all your boasting of the truth between us.
For, there is none that having house and lands,
That have been in the one family

ON BAILE'S STRAND

And called by the one name for centuries,
But is made miserable if he know
They are to pass into a stranger's keeping,
As yours will pass.

CUCHULAIN. The most of men feel that,
But you and I leave names upon the harp.

CONCHOBAR. You play with arguments as lawyers do,
And put no heart in them. I know your thoughts,
For we have slept under the one cloak and drunk
From the one wine cup. I know you to the bone.
I have heard you cry, aye in your very sleep,
"I have no son," and with such bitterness
That I have gone upon my knees and prayed
That it might be amended.

CUCHULAIN. For you thought
That I should be as biddable as others
Had I their reason for it, but that's not true,
For I would need a weightier argument
Than one that marred me in the copying,
As I have that clean hawk out of the air
That, as men say, begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.

CONCHOBAR. Now as ever
You mock at every reasonable hope,
And would have nothing, or impossible things.
What eye has ever looked upon the child
Would satisfy a mind like that?

CUCHULAIN. I would leave
My house and name to none that would not face
Even myself in battle.

SELECTED POEMS

CONCHOBAR. Being swift of foot
And making light of every common chance,
You should have overtaken on the hills
Some daughter of the air, or on the shore
A daughter of the country-under-wave.

CUCHULAIN. I am not blasphemous.

CONCHOBAR. Yet you despise
Our queens, and would not call a child your own,
If one of them had borne him.

CUCHULAIN. I have not said it.

CONCHOBAR. Ah! I remember I have heard you boast,
When the ale was in your blood, that there was one
In Scotland, where you had learnt the trade of war,
That had a stone-pale cheek and red-brown hair.
And that although you had loved other women,
You'd sooner that fierce woman of the camp
Bore you a son than any queen among them.

CUCHULAIN. You call her a "fierce woman of the camp,"

For having lived among the spinning wheels,
You'd have no woman near that would not say,
"Ah! how wise!" "What will you have for supper?"
"What shall I wear that I may please you, sir?"
And keep that humming through the day and night
For ever — a fierce woman of the camp —
But I am getting angry about nothing.
You have never seen her, ah! Conchobar, had you seen her
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward and the bow-string at her ear,
Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes

ON BAILE'S STRAND

Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
Or when love ran through all the lineaments
Of her wild body — although she had no child,
None other had all beauty, queen, and lover,
Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

CONCHOBAR. There's nothing I can say but drifts
you farther

From the one weighty matter — that very woman —
For I know well that you are praising Aoife —
Now hates you and will leave no subtilty
Unknotted that might run into a noose
About your throat — no army in idleness
That might bring ruin on this land you serve.

CUCHULAIN. No wonder in that, no wonder at all
in that.

I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed moon,
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of this long 'stablished ground.

CONCHOBAR.

Listen to me.

Aoife makes war on us, and every day
Our enemies grow greater and beat the walls
More bitterly, and you within the walls
Are every day more turbulent, and yet,
When I would speak about these things, your mind
Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.

SELECTED POEMS

[*Outside the door in the blue light of the sea mist are many old and young KINGS, amongst them are three WOMEN, two of whom carry a bowl full of fire. The third, in what follows, puts from time to time fragrant herbs into the fire so that it flickers up into brighter flame.*]

Look at the door and what men gather there,
Old counsellors that steer the land with me,
And younger kings, the dancers and harp players
That follow in your tumults, and all these
Are held there by the one anxiety.
Will you be bound into obedience
And so make this land safe for them and theirs?
You are but half a king and I but half;
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.

CUCHULAIN [*going near to door*]. Nestlings of a
high nest,

Hawks that have followed me into the air
And looked upon the sun, we'll out of this
And sail upon the wind once more. This king
Would have me take an oath to do his will
And having listened to his tune from morning,
I will no more of it. Run to the stable
And set the horses to the chariot pole,
And send a messenger to the harp players.
We'll find a level place among the woods,
And dance awhile.

A YOUNG KING. Cuchulain, take the oath.
There is none here that would not have you take it.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

CUCHULAIN. You'd have me take it? Are you of one mind?

THE KINGS. All, all, all, all.

A YOUNG KING. Do what the High King bids you.

CONCHOBAR. There is not one but dreads this turbulence

Now that they're settled men.

CUCHULAIN. Are you so changed,

Or have I grown more dangerous of late?

But that's not it. I understand it all.

It's you that have changed. You've wives and children now,

And for that reason cannot follow one

That lives like a bird's flight from tree to tree . . .

It's time the years put water in my blood

And drowned the wildness of it, for all's changed,

But that unchanged . . . I'll take what oath you will,

The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,

I do not care how binding.

CONCHOBAR. On this fire

That has been lighted from your hearth and mine.

The older men shall be my witnesses,

The younger, yours. The holders of the fire

Shall purify the thresholds of the house

With waving fire, and shut the outer door

According to the custom; and sing rhymes

That have come down from the old law-makers

To blow the witches out. Considering

That the wild will of man could be oath-bound,

But that a woman's could not, they bid us sing

SELECTED POEMS

Against the will of woman at its wildest
In the shape changers that run upon the wind.

[CONCHOBAR *has gone on to his throne.*]

THE WOMEN [*they sing in a very low voice after the first few words so that the others all but drowned their words*]. May this fire have driven out

The shape changers that can put
Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous.
Names whereby a man has known
The threshold and the hearthstone,
Gather on the wind and drive
The women, none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay,
Planted in the running wave,
Or, for many shapes they have,
They would change them into hounds,
Until he had died of his wounds,
Though the change were but a whim;
Or they'd hurl a spell at him
That he follow with desire
Bodies that can never tire
Or grow kind, for they anoint
All their bodies, joint by joint,
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

But the man is twice forlorn,
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss;
While they murmur, "After this
Hatred may be sweet to the taste."
Those wild hands that have embraced
All his body can but shove
At the burning wheel of love,
Till the side of hate comes up;
Therefore in this ancient cup
May the sword blades drink their fill
Of the homebrew there, until
They will have for masters none
But the threshold and hearthstone.

CUCHULAIN [*speaking, while they are singing*]. I'll
take and keep this oath, and from this day
I shall be what you please, my chicks, my nestlings.
Yet I had thought you were of those that praised
Whatever life could make the pulse run quickly,
Even though it was brief, and that you held
That a free gift was better than a forced —
But that's all over — I will keep it, too.
I never gave a gift and took it again.
If the wild horse should break the chariot-pole,
It would be punished. Should that be in the oath?

[*Two of the WOMEN, still singing, crouch in front of
him holding the bowl over their heads. He spreads
his hands over the flame.*]

I swear to be obedient in all things

SELECTED POEMS

To Conchobar, and to uphold his children.

CONCHOBAR. We are one being, as these flames are one:

I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.

Now thrust the swords into the flame, and pray

That they may serve the threshold and the hearthstone

With faithful service.

[The KINGS kneel in a semicircle before the two WOMEN and CUCHULAIN, who thrusts his sword into the flame. They all put the points of their swords into the flame. The third woman is at the back near the big door.]

CUCHULAIN.

O pure, glittering ones

That should be more than wife or friend or mistress,

Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable hope,

The friendliness of the sword! —

[The song grows louder, and the last words ring out clearly. There is a low knocking at the door, and a cry of "Open, open."]

CONCHOBAR. Some king that has been loitering on the way.

Open the door, for I would have all know

That the oath's finished and Cuchulain bound,

And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

[The door is opened by the third WOMAN, and a YOUNG MAN with a drawn sword enters.]

YOUNG MAN. I am of Aoife's army.

[The KINGS rush towards him. CUCHULAIN thrusts his sword between.]

CUCHULAIN.

Put up your swords,

ON BAILE'S STRAND

He is but one. Aoife is far away.

YOUNG MAN. I have come alone into the midst of
you

To weight this sword against Cuchulain's sword.

CONCHOBAR. And are you noble? for if of common
seed,

You cannot weigh your sword against his sword
But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN. I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

CONCHOBAR. But I would know your name and not
your bonds.

You cannot speak in the Assembly House,
If you are not noble.

FIRST OLD KING. Answer the High King!

YOUNG MAN. I will give no other proof than the
hawk gives —

That it's no sparrow!

[He is silent for a moment then speaks to all.]

Yet look upon me, kings.

I, too, am of that ancient seed, and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULAIN. To have shown the hawk's grey feather
is enough,

And you speak highly, too. Give me that helmet.
I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions.
That sword and belt will do. This fighting's welcome.
The High King there has promised me his wisdom;
But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved
Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen

SELECTED POEMS

Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.

What's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear eye

Is burning nearer up in the high air?

[*Looks hard at YOUNG MAN; then comes down steps
and grasps YOUNG MAN by shoulder.*]

Hither into the light.

[*To CONCHOBAR.*]

The very tint

Of her that I was speaking of but now

Not a pin's difference.

[*To YOUNG MAN.*]

You are from the North

Where there are many that have that tint of hair —

Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come nearer, boy,

For I would have another look at you.

There's more likeness — a pale, a stone-pale cheek.

What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of
death?

YOUNG MAN. Whether I live or die is in the Gods'
hands.

CUCHULAIN. That is all words, all words, a young
man's talk.

I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength;

For he that's in the sun begot this body

Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell

It seemed as if he had outrun the moon

That he must always follow through waste heaven,

He loved so happily. He'll be but slow

To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.

Let's see that arm. I'll see it if I like.

That arm had a good father and a good mother,

But it is not like this.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

YOUNG MAN. You are mocking me;
You think I am not worthy to be fought.
But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.

CUCHULAIN. Put up your sword; I am not mocking
you.

I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not
Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
I cannot tell the reason. [To CONCHOBAR.]

He has got her fierceness.

And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.
But I will keep him with me, Conchobar,
That he may set my memory upon her
When the day's fading — you will stop with us,
And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls;
And, when we have grown weary, light our fires
Between the wood and water or on some mountain
Where the shape changers of the morning come.
The High King there would make a mock of me
Because I did not take a wife among them.
Why do you hang your head — it's a good life:
The head grows prouder in the light of the dawn,
And friendship thickens in the murmuring dark
Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white foam.
But I can see there's no more need for words
And that you'll be my friend from this day out.

CONCHOBAR. He has come thither not in his own name

But in Queen Aoife's, and has challenged you
Because you are the foremost man of us all —

CUCHULAIN. Well, well, what matter?

SELECTED POEMS

CONCHOBAR. You think it does not matter;
And that a fancy lighter than the air,
A whim of the moment has more matter in it.
For having none that shall reign after you,
You cannot think as I do, who would leave
A throne too high for insult.

CUCHULAIN. Let your children
Re-mortar their inheritance, as we have,
And put more muscle on — I will give you gifts,
But I'll have something, too—that arm ring, boy.
We'll have the quarrel out when you are older.

YOUNG MAN. There is no man I'd sooner have my
friend
Than you, whose name has gone about the world
As if it had been the wind, but Aoife'd say
I had turned coward.

CUCHULAIN. I will give you gifts
That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,
To have come from me. [*Showing cloak.*]

My father gave me this.
He came to try me, rising up at dawn
Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.
He challenged me to battle, but before
My sword had touched his sword, told me his name,
Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was woven
By women of the Country-under-Wave
Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
No; tell her that I heard a raven croak
On the north side of the house, and was afraid.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

CONCHOBAR. Some witch of the air has troubled
Cuchulain's mind.

CUCHULAIN. No witchcraft. His head is like a
woman's head

I had a fancy for.

CONCHOBAR. A witch of the air
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.
They run upon the wind and hurl the spells
That make us nothing, out of the invisible wind.
They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.

CUCHULAIN. No, no — there's nothing out of com-
mon here.

The winds are innocent — that arm ring, boy.

A KING. If I've your leave, I'll take this challenge up.

ANOTHER KING. No, give it me, High King, for this
wild Aoife

Has carried off my slaves.

ANOTHER KING. No, give it to me,
For she has harried me in house and herd.

ANOTHER KING. I claim the fight.

OTHER KINGS [*together*]. And I! And I! And I!

CUCHULAIN. Back! back! Put up your swords!

Put up your swords.

There's none alive that shall accept a challenge
I have refused. Laegaire, put up your sword.

YOUNG MAN. No, let them come. If they've a mind
for it,

I'll try it out with any two together.

CUCHULAIN. That's spoken as I'd have spoken it at
your age.

SELECTED POEMS

But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.
They're dumb, they're dumb. How many of you would
meet [Draws sword.]

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,
This edge that's greyer than the tide, this mouse
That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this —— Boy, I would meet them all in arms
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
When I have withstood for the last time the men
Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed
Upholding Conchobar, when the four provinces
Have gathered with the ravens over them.
But I'd need no avenger. You and I
Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN. We'll stand by one another from this
out.

Here is the ring.

CUCHULAIN. No, turn and turn about.
But my turn's first because I am the older.

[Taking up cloak.]

Nine queens out of the Country-under-Wave
Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea
And they were long embroidering at it — Boy,
If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me.
As certainly as if I had a son
And fought with him, I should be deadly to him.
For the old fiery fountains are far off
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

CONCHOBAR [*in a loud voice*]. No more of this. I
will not have this friendship.

Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.

He shall not go unfought, for I myself —

CUCHULAIN. I will not have it.

CONCHOBAR. You lay commands on me?

CUCHULAIN [*seizing CONCHOBAR*]. You shall not
stir, High King. I'll hold you there.

CONCHOBAR. Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS [*shouting*]. Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft!

FIRST OLD KING. Some witch has worked upon your
mind, Cuchulain.

The head of that young man seemed like a woman's

You'd had a fancy for. Then of a sudden

You laid your hands on the High King himself!

CUCHULAIN. And laid my hands on the High King
himself!

CONCHOBAR. Some witch is floating in the air above
us.

CUCHULAIN. Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft. Witches
of the air.

[*To YOUNG MAN.*]

Which of the shape changers put you to it?

Why did you? Who was it set you to this work?

Out, out! I say, for now it's sword on sword!

YOUNG MAN. But . . . but I did not.

CUCHULAIN. Out, I say, out, out!

[*YOUNG MAN goes out, followed by CUCHULAIN.*

The KINGS follow.]

KINGS. Hurry, hurry! We'll be too late. Go

SELECTED POEMS

quicker through the door! Quicker, quicker! [*Making a confused noise. The three WOMEN are left alone. One is standing by the door. Two remain at one side, holding bowl.*]

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen, I have seen!

SECOND WOMAN. What do you cry aloud?

FIRST WOMAN. The ever-living have shown me
what's to come.

THIRD WOMAN. How? Where?

FIRST WOMAN. In the ashes of the bowl.

SECOND WOMAN. While you were holding it between
your hands?

THIRD WOMAN. Speak quickly.

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen Cuchulain's roof-tree
Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

SECOND WOMAN. Cuchulain has gone out to die.

THIRD WOMAN. O! O!

SECOND WOMAN. Who could have thought that one
so great as he
Should meet his end at this unnoted sword?

FIRST WOMAN. Life drifts between a fool and a
blind man

To the end, and nobody can know his end.

SECOND WOMAN. Come, look upon the quenching of
this greatness.

[*The other two go to the door, but they stop for a
moment upon the threshold and wail.*]

FIRST WOMAN. No crying out, no need of crying out
Nor beating upon breast when it's all finished.

[*The WOMEN go out. There is a sound of clashing*

ON BAILE'S STRAND

swords from time to time during what follows.]

[Enter the FOOL dragging the BLIND MAN.]

FOOL. You have eaten it, you have eaten it. You have left me nothing but the bones.

[He throws BLIND MAN down by big chair.]

BLIND MAN. O that I should have to endure such a plague! O I ache all over! O I am pulled to pieces! This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you.

FOOL. You have eaten it. You have told me lies. You said it was done to a turn. You had eaten it all the time.

BLIND MAN. What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits? If I did not take care of you, what would you do for food and warmth?

FOOL. You take care of me! You stay safe and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gulls' eggs, while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun; and then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. *[BLIND MAN tries to rise. FOOL makes him lie down again.]*

Keep quiet now till I shut the door. *[Goes up.]* There is some noise outside, a high, vexing noise, so that I can't be listening to myself. *[Shuts door.]* Why can't they be quiet, why can't they be quiet? *[BLIND MAN tries to get away.]* Ah! you would get away, would you? *[Follows BLIND MAN and brings him back.]* Lie there, lie there. *[Throws him down. BLIND MAN again attempts to go.]* No, you won't get away. Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all

SELECTED POEMS

about you. I will tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains?

BLIND MAN. Oh, good Fool, listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there; you were always wandering about.

FOOL. The last time you brought me in, it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet now.

CUCHULAIN [*rushing in*]. Witchcraft! There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

FOOL. Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

CUCHULAIN. Fill me a horn of ale.

BLIND MAN. I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather. [CUCHULAIN *goes up to big door and looks out while* BLIND MAN *speaks.*]

FOOL. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

CUCHULAIN [*turning*]. Fill me that horn. [FOOL *brings horn.*] Quarrels here, too. [*Drinks and hands*

ON BAILE'S STRAND

horn to FOOL.] What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel? Out with it.

BLIND MAN. Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking — thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream. [*FOOL has begun singing while BLIND MAN is speaking.*]

FOOL. When you were an acorn on the tree-top,
Then was I an eagle cock;
Now that you are a withered old block,
Still am I an eagle cock.

BLIND MAN. Listen to him now. That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in. [*The FOOL is putting the feathers of the hen into his hair. CUCHULAIN takes a handful of feathers and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.*]

FOOL. He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword. [*CUCHULAIN goes up to big door and throws feathers away.*]

CUCHULAIN. They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him for all his witchcraft.

BLIND MAN. It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN. He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

FOOL. That Blind Man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That Blind

SELECTED POEMS

Man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULAIN. You knew him then?

BLIND MAN. I saw him when I had my eyes in Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN. You were in Aoife's country?

BLIND MAN. I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULAIN. He was about to speak of her when he died.

BLIND MAN. He was a queen's son.

CUCHULAIN [*rushing at and seizing BLIND MAN*]. What queen, what queen? Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

BLIND MAN. No, not Scathach.

CUCHULAIN. It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

BLIND MAN. I cannot speak. You are clutching me too tightly. [CUCHULAIN *lets him go*.] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

FOOL. He said a little while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULAIN. She! No, no. She had no son when I was there.

FOOL. That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULAIN. I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman,—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

BLIND MAN. None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULAIN. None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN. No, no. I knew nothing.

FOOL. He said awhile ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. [*A pause.*]

BLIND MAN. Somebody is trembling, Fool. The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL. It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is he who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN. It is his own son that he has killed.

CUCHULAIN. 'Twas they that did it, the pale, windy people.

Where? where? where? My sword against the thunder,
But no, for they have always been my friends;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory and heart-uplifting pride,
And not like this. The wars they love awaken
Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
Who did it, then? Are you afraid? Speak out!
For I have put you under my protection,
And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer.
He had an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.
Laegaire did it! Why do you not speak?
What is this house? [*Pause.*] Now I remember all.

SELECTED POEMS

[*Comes before CONCHOBAR'S chair and strikes out with his sword.*]

'Twas you who did it — you who sat up there,
With your old rod of kingship, like a magpie,
Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie.
A maggot that is eating up the earth!
Yes, but a magpie, for he's flown away.
Where did he fly to?

BLIND MAN. He is outside the door.

CUCHULAIN. Outside the door?

BLIND MAN. Between the door and the sea.

CUCHULAIN. Conchobar, Conchobar! the sword into
your heart.

[*He rushes out. Pause. FOOL creeps up to big door
and looks after him.*]

FOOL. He is going up to King Conchobar. They
are all about the young man. No, no. He is standing
still. There is a great wave going to break, and he is
looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea,
but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into
a fight. [*Pause.*] Well struck! well struck!

BLIND MAN. What is he doing now?

FOOL. Oh! he is fighting the waves!

BLIND MAN. He sees King Conchobar's crown on
every one of them.

FOOL. There, he has struck at a big one! He has
struck the crown off it. He has made the foam fly.
There again, another big one!

BLIND MAN. Where are the kings? What are the
kings doing?

ON BAILE'S STRAND

FOOL. They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running.

BLIND MAN. You say they are running out of the houses. There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool.

FOOL. There, he is down. He is up again. He is going out into the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN. Come here, Fool!

FOOL. The waves have mastered him!

BLIND MAN. Come here, I say.

FOOL [*coming towards him, but looking backwards towards the door*]. What is it?

BLIND MAN. There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly. The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*]

CURTAIN

DEIRDRE

DEIRDRE

SCENE. *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier; they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.*

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have a story right, my wanderers,

That has so mixed with fable in our songs,
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and this house
Is an old guest-house built for travellers

SELECTED POEMS

From the seashore to Conchubar's royal house,
And there are certain hills among these woods,
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

SECOND MUSICIAN. That famous queen
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?

FIRST MUSICIAN [*going nearer to the brazier*].
Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found
A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there's nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage day,
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,
Naisi, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
Carried her off.

SECOND MUSICIAN. The tale were well enough
Had it a finish.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Hush! I have more to tell;
But gather close that I may whisper it:
I carry terrible, mysterious news —
The secrets of a king.

DEIRDRE

SECOND MUSICIAN. There's none to hear!

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have been to Conchubar's house
and followed up

A crowd of servants going out and in
With loads upon their heads: embroideries
To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes
To strew upon the floors, and came at length
To a great room.

SECOND MUSICIAN. Be silent; there are steps!

[*Enter FERGUS, an old man, who moves about from
door to window excitedly through what follows.*]

FERGUS. I thought to find a message from the king.
You are musicians by these instruments,
And if as seems — for you are comely women —
You can praise love, you'll have the best of luck,
For there'll be two, before the night is in,
That bargained for their love, and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time
To weigh a happy music with a sad;
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the son of Usna and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Deirdre and her man!

FERGUS. I was to have found a message in this house,
And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Ragh?

FIRST MUSICIAN. Are Deirdre and her lover tired of
life?

FERGUS. You are not of this country, or you'd know
That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

SELECTED POEMS

FIRST MUSICIAN. We have no country but the roads
of the world.

FERGUS. Then you should know that all things change
in the world,
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

FIRST MUSICIAN. An old man's love
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure;
His jealousy is like his love.

FERGUS. And that's but true.
You have learned something in your wanderings.
He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,
But I alone, thought it impossible;
Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,
I had my way, and all's forgiven now;
And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
That I lack tongue for.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS [*going to door*]. I am Conchubar's near
friend, and that weighed somewhat,
And it was policy to pardon them.
The need of some young, famous, popular man
To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,
And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.
They have been wandering half-a-dozen years.

FIRST MUSICIAN. And yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS [*coming from door*]. Sing the more sweetly
Because, though age is arid as a bone,
This man has flowered. I've need of music, too;
If this grey head would suffer no reproach,

DEIRDRE

I'd dance and sing —

[*Dark-faced MEN with strange, barbaric dress and arms begin to pass by the doors and windows. They pass one by one and in silence.*]

and dance till the hour ran out,

Because I have accomplished this good deed.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Look there — there at the window, those dark men,

With murderous and outlandish-looking arms —

They've been about the house all day.

FERGUS [*looking after them*]. What are you?

Where do you come from, who is it sent you here?

FIRST MUSICIAN. They will not answer you.

FERGUS. They do not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes

That have seen many lands, they are such men

As kings will gather for a murderous task,

That neither bribes, commands, nor promises

Can bring their people to.

FERGUS. And that is why

You harped upon an old man's jealousy.

A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's fame

Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.

They may have brought him Libyan dragon-skin,

Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

FIRST MUSICIAN. If these be merchants, I have seen the goods

They have brought to Conchubar, and understood

His murderous purpose.

SELECTED POEMS

FERGUS. Murderous, you say?
Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?
But I'll not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I may be life or death.
There is a room in Conchubar's house, and there—

FERGUS. Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.
There's many a one that would do more than that,
And make it prison, or death, or banishment
To slander the high King.

[Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.]

He is my friend ;

I have his oath, and I am well content.
I have known his mind as if it were my own
These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought
Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit
By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
That common things are lost, and all that's strange
Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.

[Going to the door again.]

Quick! quick! your instruments! they are coming now.
I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song;
But what is it to be? I'd have them hear
A music foaming up out of the house
Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse
Of some old time not worth remembering,
And all the lovelier because a bubble.
Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,
Of Ludgaidh Redstripe or another; no, not him,

DEIRDRE

He and his lady perished wretchedly.

FIRST MUSICIAN [*singing*].

“Why is it,” Queen Edain said,

“If I do but climb the stair” . . .

FERGUS. Ah! that is better. . . . They are alighted now.

Shake all your cockscombs, children; these are lovers.

[FERGUS *goes out*.]

FIRST MUSICIAN.

“Why is it,” Queen Edain said,

“If I do but climb the stair

To the tower overhead,

When the winds are calling there,

Or the gannets calling out,

In waste places of the sky,

There's so much to think about,

That I cry, that I cry?”

SECOND MUSICIAN.

But her goodman answered her:

“Love would be a thing of naught

Had not all his limbs a stir

Born out of immoderate thought;

Were he anything by half,

Were his measure running dry.

Lovers, if they may not laugh,

Have to cry, have to cry.”

[DEIRDRE, NAISI, and FERGUS have been seen for a moment through the windows, but now they have entered.]

SELECTED POEMS

THE THREE MUSICIANS [*together*].

But is Edain worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew?
Praise the beautiful and strong;
Praise the redness of the yew;
Praise the blossoming apple-stem.
But our silence had been wise.
What is all our praise to them
That have one another's eyes?

DEIRDRE. Silence your music, though I thank you for
it;

But the wind's blown upon my hair, and I
Must set the jewels on my neck and head
For one that's coming.

NAISI. Your colour has all gone
As 'twere with fear, and there's no cause for that.

DEIRDRE. These women have the raddle that they
use

To make them brave and confident, although
Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o' their cheeks.
You'll help me, women. It is my husband's will
I show my trust in one, that may be here
Before the mind can call the colour up.
My husband took these rubies from a king
Of Surracha that was so murderous
He seemed all glittering dragon. Now wearing them
Myself wars on myself, for I myself —
That do my husband's will, yet fear to do it —
Grow dragonish to myself.

[*The Women have gathered about her.* NAISI has

DEIRDRE

stood looking at her, but FERGUS brings him to the chess table.]

FERGUS.

We'll play at chess
Till the king comes. It is but natural
That she should fear him, for her house has been
The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

NAISI. If I were childish and had faith in omens,
I'd rather not have lit on that old chessboard
At my home-coming.

FERGUS.

There's a tale about it —
It has been lying there these many years —
Some wild old sorrowful tale.

NAISI.

It is the board
Where Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
Who had a sea-bird's body half the year,
Played at the chess upon the night they died.

FERGUS. I can remember now, a tale of treachery,
A broken promise and a journey's end —
But it were best forgot.

[DEIRDRE has been standing with the WOMEN about her. They have been helping her to put on her jewels and to put the pigment on her cheeks and arrange her hair. She has gradually grown attentive to what FERGUS is saying.]

NAISI.

If the tale's true,
When it was plain that they had been betrayed,
They moved the men and waited for the end
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds
They hardly winked their eyes when the sword flashed.

SELECTED POEMS

FERGUS. She never could have played so, being a woman,
If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.

DEIRDRE. I have heard the ever-living warn mankind
By changing clouds and casual accidents,
Or what seem so.

NAISI. It would but ill become us,
Now that King Conchubar has pledged his word,
Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.

DEIRDRE. There's none to welcome us.

NAISI. Being his guest,
Words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves.

DEIRDRE. An empty house upon the journey's end!
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest?

FERGUS. He is but making ready
A welcome in his house, arranging where
The moorhen and the mallard go, and where
The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.

DEIRDRE. Had he no messenger?

NAISI. Such words and fears
Wrong this old man who's pledged his word to us.
You speak as women do that sit alone
Marking among the ashes with a stick
Till they are terrified.— You are a queen:
You should have too calm thought to start at shadows.

[To FERGUS.] Come, let us look if there's a messenger
From Conchubar. We cannot see from this
Because we are blinded by the leaves and twigs,

DEIRDRE

But it may be the wood will thin again.
It is but kind that when the lips we love
Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears
Our ears be deaf.

FERGUS. But now I had to threaten
These wanderers because they would have weighed
Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.
If I had thought so little of mankind,
I never could have moved him to this pardon.
I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

[NAISI and FERGUS go out. *The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about talking, or looking along the road towards CONCHUBAR'S house.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN. If anything lies heavy on your heart,

Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

DEIRDRE. You've been in love?

FIRST MUSICIAN. If you would speak of love,
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the kisses
That were upon our lips, and when we are old
Their memory will be all the life we have.

DEIRDRE. There was a man that loved me.

SELECTED POEMS

He was old;
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.
He has made promises, and brought me home;
But though I turn it over in my thoughts,
I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have heard he loved you,
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.

DEIRDRE. You mean that when a man who has loved
like that
Is after crossed, love drowns, in its own flood,
And that love drowned and floating is but hate;
And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,
Till he has killed; and that, though the day laughs,
We shall be dead at cock-crow.

FIRST MUSICIAN. You have not my thought.
When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied till my passion had run out,
That could I carry him away with me,
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

DEIRDRE. Ah! now I catch your meaning, that this
king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

FIRST MUSICIAN. 'Tis you that put that meaning
upon words
Spoken at random.

DEIRDRE. Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,

DEIRDRE

Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random; if they hint at it at all
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.

FIRST MUSICIAN. We have little that is certain.

DEIRDRE. Certain or not.

Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it;
I never have met any of your kind,
But that I gave them money, food and fire.

FIRST MUSICIAN. There are strange, miracle-work-
ing, wicked stones,
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons.

DEIRDRE. The hot Istain stone,
And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.

FIRST MUSICIAN. They have so great an influence,
if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.

DEIRDRE. O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory,
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe!

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have seen a bridal bed, so cur-
tained in,
So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
And learned that a bride's coming.

DEIRDRE. And I the bride?
Here is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,
For she but died and mixed into the dust

SELECTED POEMS

Of her dear comrade, but I am to live
And lie in the one bed with him I hate.
Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this
When Conchubar first chose me for his wife;
I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,
But now there is worse need.

NAISI [*entering with* FERGUS]. Why have you
called?

I was but standing there, without the door.

DEIDRE. I have heard terrible mysterious things,
Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

FERGUS. Why, that's no wonder. You have been
listening

To singers of the roads that gather up
The stories of the world.

DEIRDRE. But I have one
To make the stories of the world but nothing.

NAISI. Be silent if it is against the king
Whose guest you are.

FERGUS. No, let her speak it out,
I know the High King's heart as it were my own,
And can refute a slander, but already
I have warned these women that it may be death.

NAISI. I will not weigh the gossip of the roads
With the king's word. I ask you pardon for her:
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.

DEIRDRE. Am I to see the fowler and the cage
And speak no word at all?

NAISI. You would have known,

DEIRDRE

Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.

DEIRDRE. Though death may come of it?

NAISI. Though death may come.

FERGUS. To those that slander kings.

DEIRDRE. Then I will say

What it were best to carry to the grave.
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.
It was for him, to stir him to desire,
I put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar.

NAISI. What frenzy put these words into your
mouth?

DEIRDRE. No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy
To change what shifts with every change of the wind,
Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings?
Was I not born a woman?

NAISI. You're mocking me.

DEIRDRE. And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

NAISI. What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight?

DEIRDRE. Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men's hearts
And lack it in themselves?

NAISI. Come, I command it:

SELECTED POEMS

We'll to the horses and take ship again.

FERGUS. Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy
With crafty words.

DEIRDRE. Where we not born to wander?
These jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword
Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me;
But who can tell what change can come to love
Among the valleys? I speak no falsehood now.
Away to windy summits, and there mock
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird!

FERGUS. Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel
up
That has brought death to many. I have poured
Water upon the fire, but if you fly
A second time, the house is in a blaze,
And all the screaming household will but blame
The savage heart of beauty for it all;
And Naisi, that has helped to tar the wisp,
Shall be a hunted outlaw all his days.

DEIRDRE. I will be blamed no more.
There's but one way:
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery
And houseless wandering on the man I loved.
These wanderers will show me how to do it;
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars.
Oh, that the creatures of the woods had torn
My body with their claws!

FERGUS. What, wilder yet!

DEIRDRE

DEIRDRE [*to NAISI*]. Whatever were to happen to
my face

I'd be myself, and there's not any way
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

NAISI. What have you told to put such frenzy in
her?

FERGUS. Yes, speak it out.

NAISI. I give you my protection;

Are you afraid to speak? Does the king love her?

Will no one answer?

DEIRDRE. Tell out all the plot,

The plan, the network, all the treachery;

Tell of the bridal chamber and the bed,

The magical stones, the wizard's handiwork.

NAISI. Ah! now I understand why it is you fear

To waken death with words. Take care of Deirdre:

She must not fall alive into his hands,

Whatever the cost.

DEIRDRE. Where would you go to, Naisi?

NAISI. I go to drag the truth from Conchubar,

Before his people, in the face of his army,

And if it be as black as you have made it,

To kill him there.

DEIRDRE. You never would return;

I'll never look upon your face again.

Oh, keep him, Fergus; do not let him go,

But hold him from it. You are both wise and kind.

NAISI. When you were all but Conchubar's wife, I

took you;

He tried to kill me, and he would have done it

SELECTED POEMS

If I had been so near as I am now.

And now that you are mine, he has planned to take you.

Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man?

[*Dark-faced MESSENGER comes into the house unnoticed.*]

MESSENGER. Supper is on the table, Conchubar
Is waiting for his guests.

FERGUS. All's well, again!

All's well! all's well! You cried your doubts so loud
That I had almost doubted.

NAISI. I would have killed him,
And he the while but busy in his house
For the more welcome.

DEIRDRE. The message is not finished.

FERGUS. Come quickly. Conchubar will laugh, that

I —

Although I held out boldly in my speech —

That I, even I —

DEIRDRE. Wait, wait! He is not done.

MESSENGER. Deirdre, and Fergus son of Rogh, are
summoned;

But not the traitor that bore off the queen.

It is enough that the king pardon her,

And call her to his table and his bed.

NAISI. So then, it's treachery.

FERGUS. I'll not believe it.

NAISI. Tell Conchubar to meet me in some place
Where none can come between us but our swords,
For I have found no truth on any tongue
That's not of iron.

DEIRDRE

MESSANGER. I am Conchubar's man;
I take no message but he bids me do it.

[*He goes.*]

NAISI. I bid you. I will have you swear to take it.

[*He follows MESSANGER out.*]

FERGUS. Some enemy has paid him well for this.
I know King Conchubar's mind as it were my own;
I'll learn the truth from him.

[*He is about to follow NAISI, but DEIRDRE stops him.*]

DEIRDRE. No, no, old man,
You thought the best, and the worst came of it;
We listened to the counsel of the wise,
And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.
Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me;
It may be that his passion is asleep,
And that we may escape.

FERGUS. But I'll go first,
And follow up that Libyan heel, and send
Such words to Conchubar, that he may know
At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

[*NAISI enters.*]

NAISI. The Libyan, knowing that a servant's life
Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and mocked.

FERGUS. I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-
hooks,
And carry you in safety to the ships.
My name has still some power. I will protect,
Or, if that is impossible, revenge. [*Goes out by other door.*]

SELECTED POEMS

NAISI [*who is calm like a man who has passed beyond life*]. The crib has fallen and the birds are in it; There is not one of the great oaks about us But shades a hundred men.

DEIRDRE. Let's out and die,
Or break away, if the chance favour us.

NAISI. They would but drag you from me, stained
with blood.

Their barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,
And I would have you die as a queen should —
In a death chamber. You are in my charge.
We will wait here, and when they come upon us,
I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's over,
Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.

DEIDRE. I will stay here; but you go out and fight.
Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them leaving it,
We shall be ever friendless.

NAISI. What do they say?
That Lugaidh Redstripe and that wife of his
Sat at this chessboard, waiting for their end.
They knew that there was nothing that could save them
And so played chess as they had any night
For years, and waited for the stroke of sword,
I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting?

DEIRDRE

I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.

[*To MUSICIANS.*] Had you been here when that
man and his queen

Played at so high a game, could you have found
An ancient poem for the praise of it?
It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew
Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,
As though she'd say: "There's nothing happening
But that a king and queen are playing chess."

DEIRDRE. He's in the right, though I have not been
born

Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot.
And though I have loved better than that queen,
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.
Oh, singing women, set it down in a book
That love is all we need, even though it is
But the last drops we gather up like this;
And though the drops are all we have known of life,—
For we have been most friendless,—praise us for it.
And praise the double sunset, for naught's lacking,
But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

NAISI. Light torches there and drive the shadows
out.

For day's grey end comes up.

[*A MUSICIAN lights a torch in the fire and then*

SELECTED POEMS

crosses before the chess-players, and slowly lights the torches in the sconces. The light is almost gone from the wood, but there is a clear evening light in the sky, increasing the sense of solitude and loneliness.

DEIRDRE.

Make no sad music.

What is it but a king and queen at chess?

They need a music that can mix itself

Into imagination, but not break

The steady thinking that the hard game needs.

[*During the chess, the MUSICIANS sing this song.*]

Love is an immoderate thing

And can never be content,

Till it dip an ageing wing,

Where some laughing element

Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.

What's the merit in love-play,

In the tumult of the limbs

That dies out before 'tis day,

Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,

All that mingling of our breath,

When love longing is but drouth

For the things come after death?

[*During the last verses DEIRDRE rises from the board and kneels at NAISI's feet.*]

DEIRDRE. I cannot go on playing like that woman
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.

NAISI. It is your move. Take up your man again.

DEIRDRE. Do you remember that first night in the
woods

DEIRDRE

We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,
When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,
Saw leaves above us? You thought that I still slept,
And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,
Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that's over, we'll be different;
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.
And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

[CONCHUBAR comes to the door.]

MUSICIAN. Children, beware!

NAISI [*laughing*]. He has taken up my challenge;
Whether I am a ghost or living man
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.

[*Turns to fetch spear and shield, and then sees that
CONCHUBAR has gone.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN. He came to spy upon you, not to
fight.

NAISI. A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.
He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting, but has come too near,
And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.
Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it's topsy-turvey. I upon you.

[*He rushes out after CONCHUBAR.*]

DEIRDRE. You have a knife there, thrust into your
girdle.

I'd have you give it me.

SELECTED POEMS

MUSICIAN. No, but I dare not.

DEIRDRE. No, but you must.

MUSICIAN. If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.

DEIRDRE [*snatching knife*]. There is no mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge. [*Goes to the door and looks out.*]

MUSICIAN. You have taken it,
I did not give it you; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

DEIRDRE. The leaves hide all, and there's no way to
find
What path to follow. Why is there no sound?

[*She goes from door to window.*]

MUSICIAN. Where would you go?

DEIRDRE. To strike a blow for Naisi,
If Conchubar calls the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash? They have met by this!

MUSICIAN. Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much,
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred?

DEIRDRE [*going towards them*]. Women, if I die,
If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?
What words seek out? for that will stand to you;
For being but dead we shall have many friends.
All through your wanderings, the doors of kings

DEIRDRE

Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth
Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this
[*Gives MUSICIAN a bracelet.*]

To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

MUSICIAN. Have you not been paid servants in love's
house

To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors?

And though you have suffered all for mere love's sake,
You'd live your lives again.

DEIRDRE. Even this last hour.

[*CONCHUBAR enters with dark-faced Men.*]

CONCHUBAR. One woman and two men; that is a
quarrel

That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose
Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.

[*The dark-faced MEN drag in NAISI entangled in a net.*]

NAISI. I have been taken like a bird or a fish.

CONCHUBAR. He cried "Beast, beast!" and in a
blind-beast rage

He ran at me and fell into the nets,

But we were careful for your sake, and took him

With all the comeliness that woke desire

Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient —

I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

DEIRDRE. What do you say? Have you forgiven
him?

NAISI. He is but mocking us. What's left to say
Now that the seven years' hunt is at an end?

DEIRDRE. He never doubted you until I made him,

SELECTED POEMS

And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

CONCHUBAR. But his young blood is hot,
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly wronged,
Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.
Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of youth
You carried her away; but I've had time
To think it out through all these seven years.
I will show mercy.

NAISA. You have many words.

CONCHUBAR. I will not make a bargain; I but ask
What is already mine.

[DEIRDRE moves slowly towards CONCHUBAR while
he is speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.]

You may go free
If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.
The doors are open, and the floors are strewed,
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness,
By races that are germane to the sun,
And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins —
For when they're wounded the wound drips with wine —

DEIRDRE

Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands
The crown and robe.

DEIRDRE. Oh, no! Not that, not that,
Ask any other thing but that one thing.
Leave me with Naisi. We will go away
Into some country at the ends of the earth.
We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one
That will not praise you if you pardon us.
"He is good, he is good," they'll say to one another;
"There's nobody like him, for he forgave
Deirdre and Naisi."

CONCHUBAR. Do you think that I
Shall let you go again, after seven years
Of longing and of planning here and there,
And trafficking with merchants for the stones
That make all sure, and watching my own face
That none might read it?

DEIRDRE [*to NAISI*]. It's better to go with him.
Why should you die when one can bear it all?
My life is over; it's better to obey.
Why should you die? I will not live long, Naisi.
I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living;
Oh no, no, no! You will go far away.
You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi, speak,
And say that it is better that I go.
I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,
For I will take it all upon myself.
Conchubar, I will go.

NAISI.

And do you think
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That, were I given life at such a price,
I would not cast it from me? O, my eagle!
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night's above?

DEIRDRE.

It's better, Naisi.

It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.
For what am I, to be remembered always?
And there are other women. There was one,
The daughter of the King of Leodas;
I could not sleep because of her. Speak to him;
Tell it out plain, and make him understand.
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,
Say that I will not.

NAISI.

Would I had lost life

Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,
Because you were my wife, or that the worst
Had taken you before this bargaining!
O eagle! If you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits, and call out,
And you could never come there, being banished.

DEIRDRE [*kneeling to CONCHUBAR*]. I would obey,
but cannot. Pardon us.

I know that you are good. I have heard you praised
For giving gifts; and you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.

[Unseen by DEIRDRE, NAISI is gagged.]

The very moment these eyes fell on him,

DEIRDRE

I told him; I held out my hands to him;
How could he refuse? At first he would not —
I am not lying — he remembered you.
What do I say? My hands? — No, no, my lips —
For I had pressed my lips upon his lips —
I swear it is not false — my breast to his;

[CONCHUBAR motions; NAISI, unseen by DEIRDRE, is
taken behind the curtain.]

Until I woke the passion that's in all,
And how could he resist? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong man,
Who is not foolish at the council board,
Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light
And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
Moves him to mirth, not madness. [*She stands up.*]
What am I saying?

You may have need of him, for you have none
Who is so good a sword, or so well loved
Among the common people. You may need him,
And what king knows when the hour of need may come?
You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.
Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
"I am Conchubar — I have no need of him."
You will cry out for him some day and say,
"If Naisi were but living" — [*She misses NAISI.*]
Where is he?

Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?
Where is he, O, where is he?

[*She staggers over to the MUSICIANS. The EXECUTIONER has come out with sword on which there is*

SELECTED POEMS

*blood; CONCHUBAR points to it. The MUSICIANS
give a wail.]*

CONCHUBAR. The traitor who has carried off my
wife

No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre,
For he that called himself your husband's dead.

DEIRDRE. O, do not touch me. Let me go to him.
[*Pause.*]

King Conchubar is right. My husband's dead.
A single woman is of no account,
Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,
The bacon hanging — and King Conchubar's house
All ready, too — I'll to King Conchubar's house.
It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

CONCHUBAR. But why are you so calm?
I thought that you would curse me and cry out,
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.

DEIRDRE [*laughing*]. You know too much of women
to think so;
Though, if I were less worthy of desire,
I would pretend as much; but, being myself,
It is enough that you were master here.
Although we are so delicately made,
There's something brutal in us, and we are won
By those who can shed blood. It was some woman
That taught you how to woo: but do not touch me:
I shall do all you bid me, but not yet
Because I have to do what's customary.
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,

DEIRDRE

Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,
And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all's in order; and all this I'll do
For Naisi, son of Usna.

CONCHURAB. It is not fitting.
You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,
And there are plenty that can do these things.

DEIRDRE [*motioning CONCHUBAR away*].
No, no. Not yet. I cannot be your queen,
Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.
When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,
He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
"There's so much owing."

CONCHUBAR. You are deceiving me.
You long to look upon his face again.
Why should I give you now to a dead man
That took you from a living?

[*He makes a step towards her.*]

DEIRDRE. In good time.
You'll stir me to more passion than he could,
And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this:
That I go look upon him that was once
So strong and comely and held his head so high
That women envied me. For I will see him
All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
It's better, when you're beside me in your strength,
That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,
And not the shape I loved. Look at him, women.
He heard me pleading to be given up,
Although my lover was still living, and yet

SELECTED POEMS

He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell him
How changeable all women are. How soon
Even the best of lovers is forgot,
When his day's finished.

CONCHUBAR. No; but I will trust
The strength that you have praised, and not your purpose.

DEIRDRE [*almost with a caress*]. It is so small a gift
and you will grant it
Because it is the first that I have asked.
He has refused. There is no sap in him;
Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.
He has refused me the first thing I have asked —
Me, me, his wife. I understand him now;
I know the sort of life I'll have with him;
But he must drag me to his house by force.
If he refuse [*she laughs*], he shall be mocked of all.
They'll say to one another, "Look at him
That is so jealous that he lured a man
From over sea, and murdered him, and yet
He trembled at the thought of a dead face!"

[*She has her hand upon curtain*]

CONCHUBAR. How do I know that you have not
some knife,
And go to die upon his body?

DEIRDRE. Have me searched,
If you would make so little of your queen.
It may be that I have a knife hid here
Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slaves
To search me for it.

[*Pause*]

DEIRDRE

CONCHUBAR. Go to your farewells, queen.

DEIRDRE. Now strike the wire, and sing to it a while,
Knowing that all is happy, and that you know
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night
And by what man, and lie close up to him,
For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-crow.
[*She goes behind the curtain.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN. They are gone, they are gone.
The proud may lie by the proud.

SECOND MUSICIAN. Though we were bidden to sing,
cry nothing loud.

FIRST MUSICIAN. They are gone, they are gone.

SECOND MUSICIAN. Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Into the secret wilderness of their
love.

SECOND MUSICIAN. A high, grey cairn. What more
is to be said?

FIRST MUSICIAN. Eagles have gone into their cloudy
bed.

[*Shouting outside. FERGUS enters. Many men with
scythes and sickles and torches gather about the doors.
The house is lit with the glare of their torches.*]

FERGUS. Where's Naisi, son of Usna, and his queen?
[and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.]

CONCHUBAR. You have come too late.
I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine;
She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.
I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull
This apple among the winds. Open the curtain,

SELECTED POEMS

That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

[*The curtain is drawn back. The MUSICIANS begin to keen with low voices.*]

No, no; I'll not believe it. She is not dead —
She cannot have escaped a second time!

FERGUS. King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon
her.

What's this but empty cage and tangled wire,
Now the bird's gone? but I'll not have you touch it.

CONCHUBAR. You are all traitors, all against me —
all.

And she has deceived me for a second time.
And every common man can keep his wife,
But not the King.

[*Loud shouting outside: 'Death to Conchubar!'*
'Where is Naisi?' etc...The dark-skinned MEN
gather round CONCHUBAR and draw their swords;
but he motions them away.]

I have no need of weapons,
There's not a traitor that dare stop my way.
Howl, if you will; but I, being king, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.

LYRICS
(1904-1919)

HIS DREAM

I swayed upon the gaudy stern
The butt end of a steering oar,
And everywhere that I could turn
Men ran upon the shore.

And though I would have hushed the crowd
There was no mother's son but said,
"What is the figure in a shroud
Upon a gaudy bed?"

And fishes bubbling to the brim
Cried out upon that thing beneath,
— It had such dignity of limb —
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I'd my finger on my lip,
What could I but take up the song?
And fish and crowd and gaudy ship
Cried out the whole night long,

Crying amid the glittering sea,
Naming it with ecstatic breath,
Because it had such dignity
By the sweet name of Death.

A WOMAN HOMER SUNG

If any man drew near
When I was young,
I thought, "He holds her dear,"
And shook with hate and fear.
But oh, 'twas bitter wrong
If he could pass her by
With an indifferent eye.

Whereon I wrote and wrought,
And now, being grey,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
That coming time can say,
"He shadowed in a glass
What thing her body was."

For she had fiery blood
When I was young,
And trod so sweetly proud
As 'twere upon a cloud,
A woman Homer sung,
That life and letters seem
But an heroic dream.

THAT THE NIGHT COME

She lived in storm and strife,
Her soul had such desire
For what proud death may bring
That it could not endure
The common good of life,
But lived as 'twere a king
That packed his marriage day
With banneret and pennon,
Trumpet and kettledrum,
And the outrageous cannon,
To bundle time away
That the night come.

FRIENDS

Now must I these three praise —
Three women that have wrought
What joy is, in my days;
One that no passing thought,
Nor those unpassing cares,
No, not in these fifteen
Many times troubled years,
Could ever come between
Heart and delighted heart;
And one because her hand
Had strength that could unbind
What none can understand,
What none can have and thrive,
Youth's dreamy load, till she
So changed me that I live
Labouring in ecstasy.
And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
With scarce a pitying look?
How should I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,

FRIENDS

What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root
So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.

NO SECOND TROY

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

RECONCILIATION

Some may have blamed you that you took away
The verses that could move them on the day
When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes
 blind

With lightning you went from me, and I could find
Nothing to make a song about but kings,
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things
That were like memories of you — but now
We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;
And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,
Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.
But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,
My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

KING AND NO KING

“ Would it were anything but merely voice ! ”
The No King cried who after that was King,
Because he had not heard of anything
That balanced with a word is more than noise ;
Yet Old Romance being kind, let him prevail
Somewhere or somehow that I have forgot,
Though he'd but cannon — Whereas we that had thought
To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale
Have been defeated by that pledge you gave
In momentary anger long ago ;
And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost ?
The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,
The habitual content of each with each
When neither soul nor body has been crossed.

AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE

O heart, be at peace, because
Nor knave nor dolt can break
What's not for their applause,
Being for a woman's sake.
Enough if the work has seemed,
So did she your strength renew,
A dream that a lion had dreamed
Till the wilderness cried aloud,
A secret between you two,
Between the proud and the proud.

What, still you would have their praise!
But here's a haughtier text,
The labyrinth of her days
That her own strangeness perplexed;
And how what her dreaming gave
Earned slander, ingratitude,
From self-same dolt and knave;
Aye, and worse wrong than these,
Yet she, singing upon her road,
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

THE COLD HEAVEN

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting Heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more
ice,

And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of
season

With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to
quicken,

Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

FALLEN MAJESTY

Although crowds gathered once if she but showed her
face,

And even old men's eyes grew dim, this hand alone,
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping place,
Babbling of fallen majesty, records what's gone.

The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,
These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning
cloud.

TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND

I

Dance there upon the shore;
What need have you to care
For wind or water's roar?
And tumble out your hair
That the salt drops have wet;
Being young you have not known
The fool's triumph, nor yet
Love lost as soon as won,
Nor the best labourer dead
And all the sheaves to bind.
What need have you to dread
The monstrous crying of wind?

II

Has no one said those daring
Kind eyes should be more learn'd?
Or warned you how despairing
The moths are when they are burned,
I could have warned you, but you are young,
So we speak a different tongue.

O you will take whatever's offered
And dream that all the world's a friend,

TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND

Suffer as your mother suffered,
Be as broken in the end.
But I am old and you are young,
And I speak a barbarous tongue.

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye;
The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie.
And therefore, friend, if your great race were run
And these things came, so much the more thereby
Have you made greatness your companion,
Although it be for children that you sigh:
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

AT GALWAY RACES

There where the course is,
Delight makes all of the one mind,
The riders upon the galloping horses,
The crowd that closes in behind:
We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.
Sing on: sometime, and at some new moon,
We'll learn that sleeping is not death,
Hearing the whole earth change its tune,
Its flesh being wild, and it again
Crying aloud as the race course is,
And we find hearteners among men
That ride upon horses.

THE MOUNTAIN TOMB

Pour wine and dance if Manhood still have pride,
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;
The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet
That there be no foot silent in the room
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet;
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain; the cataract still cries
The everlasting taper lights the gloom;
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

TO A WEALTHY MAN WHO PROMISED A
SECOND SUBSCRIPTION TO THE DUBLIN
MUNICIPAL GALLERY IF IT WERE
PROVED THE PEOPLE WANTED PIC-
TURES

You gave but will not give again
Until enough of Paudeen's pence
By Biddy's halfpennies have lain
To be "some sort of evidence,"
Before you'll put your guineas down,
That things it were a pride to give
Are what the blind and ignorant town
Imagines best to make it thrive.
What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
His mummers to the market place,
What th' onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies?
And Guidobaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino's windy hill,
Had sent no runners to and fro
That he might learn the shepherds' will.
And when they drove out Cosimo,

SELECTED POEMS

Indifferent how the rancour ran,
He gave the hours they had set free
To Michelozzo's latest plan
For the San Marco Library,
Whence turbulent Italy should draw
Delight in Art whose end is peace,
In logic and in natural law
By sucking at the dugs of Greece.

Your open hand but shows our loss,
For he knew better how to live.
Let Paudeens play at pitch and toss,
Look up in the sun's eye and give
What the exultant heart calls good
That some new day may breed the best
Because you gave, not what they would
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

December 1912.

SEPTEMBER 1913

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone;
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind
The names that stilled your childish play,
They have gone about the world like wind,
But little time had they to pray
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,
And what, God help us, could they save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave;

SELECTED POEMS

Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again,
And call those exiles as they were,
In all their loneliness and pain
You'd cry "some woman's yellow hair
Has maddened every mother's son":
They weighed so lightly what they gave;
But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave.

TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK HAS
COME TO NOTHING

Now all the truth is out,
Be secret and take defeat
From any brazen throat,
For how can you compete,
Being honour bred, with one
Who, were it proved he lies,
Were neither shamed in his own
Nor in his neighbours' eyes?
Bred to a harder thing
Than Triumph, turn away
And like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone,
Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.

PAUDEEN

Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
Among the stones and thorn trees, under morning light;
Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.

TO A SHADE

If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,
Whether to look upon your monument
(I wonder if the builder has been paid)
Or happier thoughted when the day is spent
To drink of that salt breath out of the sea
When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
And the gaunt houses put on majesty:
Let these content you and be gone again;
For they are at their old tricks yet.

A man

Of your own passionate serving kind who has brought
In his full hands what, had they only known,
Had given their children's children loftier thought,
Sweeter emotion, working in their veins
Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,
And insult heaped upon him for his pains
And for his open-handedness, disgrace;
An old foul mouth that slandered you had set
The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,

And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear,
The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come;

SELECTED POEMS

You had enough of sorrow before death —
Away, away! You are safer in the tomb.

September 29th, 1914.

WHEN HELEN LIVED

We have cried in our despair
That men desert,
For some trivial affair
Or noisy, insolent sport,
Beauty that we have won
From bitterest hours;
Yet we, had we walked within
Those topless towers
Where Helen walked with her boy,
Had given but as the rest
Of the men and women of Troy,
A word and a jest.

RUNNING TO PARADISE

As I came over Windy Gap
They threw a halfpenny into my cap,
For I am running to Paradise;
And all that I need do is to wish
And somebody puts his hand in the dish
To throw me a bit of salted fish:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

My brother Mourteen is worn out
With skelping his big brawling lout,
While I am running to Paradise;
A poor life do what he can,
And though he keep a dog and a gun,
A serving maid and a serving man:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

Poor men have grown to be rich men,
And rich men grown to be poor again,
And I am running to Paradise;
And many a darling wit's grown dull
That tossed a bare heel when at school,
Now it has filled an old sock full:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

RUNNING TO PARADISE

The wind is old and still at play
While I must hurry upon my way
For I am running to Paradise;
Yet never have I lit on a friend
To take my fancy like the wind
That nobody can buy or bind:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

THE PLAYER QUEEN

(Song from a Play)

My mother dandled me and sang,
"How young it is, how young!"
And made a golden cradle
That on a willow swung.

"He went away," my mother sang,
"When I was brought to bed,"
And all the while her needle pulled
The gold and silver thread.

She pulled the thread and bit the thread
And made a golden gown,
And wept because she had dreamt that I
Was born to wear a crown.

"When she was got," my mother sang,
"I heard a sea-mew cry,
And saw a flake of the yellow foam
That dropped upon my thigh."

How therefore could she help but braid
The gold into my hair,
And dream that I should carry
The golden top of care?

THE MASK

"Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes."

"O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold."

"I would but find what's there to find,
Love or deceit."

"It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind."

"But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire."

"O no, my dear, let all that be,
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me?"

THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth Autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trode with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold,
Companionable streams or climb the air;

THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

Their hearts have grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes, when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

IN MEMORY OF
MAJOR ROBERT GREGORY

I

Now that we're almost settled in our house
I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in the ancient tower,
And having talked to some late hour
Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed:
Discoverers of forgotten truth
Or mere companions of my youth,
All, all are in my thoughts to-night, being dead.

2

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old,
And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,
And there is salt to lengthen out the smart
In the affections of our heart,
And quarrels are blown up upon that head;
But not a friend that I would bring
This night can set us quarrelling,
For all that come into my mind are dead.

3

Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,
That loved his learning better than mankind,

IN MEMORY OF MAJOR ROBERT GREGORY

Though courteous to the worst; much falling he
Brooded upon sanctity
Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed
A long blast upon the horn that brought
A little nearer to his thought
A measureless consummation that he dreamed.

4

And that enquiring man John Synge comes next,
That dying chose the living world for text
And never could have rested in the tomb
But that, long travelling, he had come
Towards nightfall upon certain set apart
In a most desolate stony place,
Towards nightfall upon a race
Passionate and simple like his heart.

5

And then I think of old George Pollexfen,
In muscular youth well known to Mayo men
For horsemanship at meets or at race-courses,
That could have shown how purebred horses
And solid men, for all their passion, live
But as the outrageous stars incline
By opposition, square and trine;
Having grown sluggish and contemplative.

6

They were my close companions many a year,
A portion of my mind and life, as it were,

SELECTED POEMS

And now their breathless faces seem to look
Out of some old picture-book;
I am accustomed to their lack of breath,
But not that my dear friend's dear son,
Our Sidney and our perfect man,
Could share in that discourtesy of death.

7

For all things the delighted eye now sees
Were loved by him; the old storm-broken trees
That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;
The tower set on the stream's edge;
The ford where drinking cattle make a stir
Nightly, and startled by that sound
The water-hen must change her ground;
He might have been your heartiest welcomer.

8

When with the Galway foxhounds he would ride
From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side
Or Esserkelly plain, few kept his pace;
At Mooneen he had leaped a place
So perilous that half the astonished meet
Had shut their eyes, and where was it
He rode a race without a bit?
And yet his mind outran the horses' feet.

9

We dreamed that a great painter had been born
To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,

IN MEMORY OF MAJOR ROBERT GREGORY

To that stern colour and that delicate line
That are our secret discipline
Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might.
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And yet he had the intensity
To have published all to be a world's delight.

10

What other could so well have counselled us
In all lovely intricacies of a house
As he that practised or that understood
All work in metal or in wood,
In moulded plaster or in carven stone?
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And all he did done perfectly
As though he had but that one trade alone.

11

Some burn damp fagots, others may consume
The entire combustible world in one small room
As though dried straw, and if we turn about
The bare chimney is gone black out
Because the work had finished in that flare.
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
As 'twere all life's epitome.
What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?

12

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind

SELECTED POEMS

All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved,
Or boyish intellect approved,
With some appropriate commentary on each;
Until imagination brought
A fitter welcome; but a thought
Of that late death took all my heart for speech.

AN IRISH AIRMAN FORESEES HIS DEATH

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public man, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

MEN IMPROVE WITH THE YEARS

I am worn out with dreams;
A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams;
And all day long I look
Upon this lady's beauty
As though I had found in book
A pictured beauty,
Pleased to have filled the eyes
Or the discerning ears,
Delighted to be but wise,
For men improve with the years;
And yet and yet
Is this my dream, or the truth?
O would that we had met
When I had my burning youth;
But I grow old among dreams,
A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams.

THE COLLAR-BONE OF A HARE

Would I could cast a sail on the water
Where many a king has gone
And many a king's daughter,
And alight at the comely trees and the lawn,
The playing upon pipes and the dancing,
And learn that the best thing is
To change my loves while dancing
And pay but a kiss for a kiss.

I would find by the edge of that water
The collar-bone of a hare
Worn thin by the lapping of water,
And pierce it through with a gimlet and stare
At the old bitter world where they marry in churches,
And laugh over the untroubled water
At all who marry in churches,
Through the white thin bone of a hare.

UNDER THE ROUND TOWER

“Although I’d lie lapped up in linen
A deal I’d sweat and little earn
If I should live as live the neighbours,”
Cried the beggar, Billy Byrne;
“Stretch bones till the daylight come
On great-grandfather’s battered tomb.”

Upon a grey old battered tombstone
In Glendalough beside the stream,
Where the O’Byrnes and Byrnes are buried,
He stretched his bones and fell in a dream
Of sun and moon that a good hour
Bellowed and pranced in the round tower;

Of golden king and silver lady,
Bellowing up and bellowing round,
Till toes mastered a sweet measure,
Mouth mastered a sweet sound,
Prancing round and prancing up
Until they pranced upon the top.

That golden king and that wild lady
Sang till stars began to fade,
Hands gripped in hands, toes close together,

UNDER THE ROUND TOWER

Hair spread on the wind they made;
That lady and that golden king
Could like a brace of blackbirds sing.

"It's certain that my luck is broken,"
That rambling jailbird Billy said;
"Before nightfall I'll pick a pocket
And snug it in a feather-bed,
I cannot find the peace of home
On great-grandfather's battered tomb."

THE DAWN

I would be ignorant as the dawn
That has looked down
On that old queen measuring a town
With the pin of a brooch,
Or on the withered men that saw
From their pedantic Babylon
The careless planets in their courses,
The stars fade out where the moon comes,
And took their tablets and did sums;
I would be ignorant as the dawn
That merely stood, rocking the glittering coach
Above the cloudy shoulders of the horses;
I would be — for no knowledge is worth a straw —
Ignorant and wanton as the dawn.

ON WOMAN

May God be praised for woman
That gives up all her mind,
A man may find in no man
A friendship of her kind
That covers all he has brought
As with her flesh and bone,
Nor quarrels with a thought
Because it is not her own.

Though pedantry denies
It's plain the Bible means
That Solomon grew wise
While talking with his queens.
Yet never could, although
They say he counted grass,
Count all the praises due
When Sheba was his lass,
When she the iron wrought, or
When from the smithy fire
It shuddered in the water:
Harshness of their desire
That made them stretch and yawn,
Pleasure that comes with sleep,
Shudder that made them one.

SELECTED POEMS

What else He give or keep
God grant me — no, not here,
For I am not so bold
To hope a thing so dear
Now I am growing old,
But when if the tale's true
The Pestle of the moon
That pounds up all anew
Brings me to birth again —
To find what once I had
And know what once I have known,
Until I am driven mad,
Sleep driven from my bed,
By tenderness and care,
Pity, an aching head,
Gnashing of teeth, despair;
And all because of some one
Perverse creature of chance,
And live like Solomon
That Sheba led a dance.

THE FISHERMAN

Although I can see him still,
The freckled man who goes
To a grey place on a hill
In grey Connemara clothes
At dawn to cast his flies,
It's long since I began
To call up to the eyes
This wise and simple man.
All day I'd looked in the face
What I had hoped 'twould be
To write for my own race
And the reality;
The living men that I hate,
The dead man that I loved,
The craven man in his seat,
The insolent unreprieved,
And no knave brought to book
Who has won a drunken cheer,
The witty man and his joke
Aimed at the commonest ear,
The clever man who cries
The catch-cries of the clown,
The beating down of the wise
And great Art beaten down.

SELECTED POEMS

Maybe a twelvemonth since
Suddenly I began,
In scorn of this audience,
Imagining a man
And his sun-freckled face,
And grey Connemara cloth,
Climbing up to a place
Where stone is dark under froth,
And the down turn of his wrist
When the flies drop in the stream:
A man who does not exist,
A man who is but a dream;
And cried, "Before I am old
I shall have written him one
Poem maybe as cold
And passionate as the dawn."

BROKEN DREAMS

There is grey in your hair.
Young men no longer suddenly catch their breath
When you are passing;
But maybe some old gaffer mutters a blessing
Because it was your prayer
Recovered him upon the bed of death.
For your sole sake — that all heart's ache have known,
And given to others all heart's ache,
From meagre girlhood's putting on
Burdensome beauty — for your sole sake
Heaven has put away the stroke of her doom,
So great her portion in that peace you make
By merely walking in a room.

Your beauty can but leave among us
Vague memories, nothing but memories.
A young man when the old men are done talking
Will say to an old man, "Tell me of that lady
The poet stubborn with his passion sang us
When age might well have chilled his blood."

Vague memories, nothing but memories,
But in the grave all, all, shall be renewed.
The certainty that I shall see that lady

SELECTED POEMS

Leaning or standing or walking
In the first loveliness of womanhood,
And with the fervour of my youthful eyes,
Has set me muttering like a fool.

You are more beautiful than any one
And yet your body had a flaw:
Your small hands were not beautiful,
And I am afraid that you will run
And paddle to the wrist
In that mysterious, always brimming lake
Where those that have obeyed the holy law
Paddle and are perfect; leave unchanged
The hands that I have kissed
For old sakes' sake.

The last stroke of midnight dies.
All day in the one chair
From dream to dream and rhyme to rhyme I have
ranged
In rambling talk with an image of air:
Vague memories, nothing but memories.

UPON A DYING LADY

I

HER COURTSEY

With the old kindness, the old distinguished grace
She lies, her lovely piteous head amid dull red hair
Propped upon pillows, rouge on the pallor of her face.
She would not have us sad because she is lying there,
And when she meets our gaze her eyes are laughter-lit,
Her speech a wicked tale that we may vie with her
Matching our broken-hearted wit against her wit,
Thinking of saints and of Petronius Arbiter.

II

CERTAIN ARTISTS BRING HER DOLLS AND DRAWINGS

Bring where our Beauty lies
A new modelled doll, or drawing,
With a friend's or an enemy's
Features, or maybe showing
Her features when a tress
Of dull red hair was flowing
Over some silken dress
Cut in the Turkish fashion,
Or it may be like a boy's.
We have given the world our passion
We have naught for death but toys.

SELECTED POEMS

III

SHE TURNS THE DOLLS' FACES TO THE WALL

Because to-day is some religious festival
They had a priest say Mass, and even the Japanese,
Heel up and weight on toe, must face the wall
— Pedant in passion, learned in old courtesies,
Vehement and witty she had seemed; the Venetian
lady
Who had seemed to glide to some intrigue in her red
shoes,
Her domino, her panniered skirt copied from Longhi;
The meditative critic: all are on their toes,
Even our Beauty with her Turkish trousers on,
Because the priest must have like every dog his day
Or keep us all awake with baying at the moon,
We and our dolls being but the world were best away.

IV

THE END OF DAY

She is playing like a child
And penance is the play,
Fantastical and wild
Because the end of day
Shows her that some one soon
Will come from the house, and say —
Though play is but half-done —
“Come in and leave the play.”—

UPON A DYING LADY

V

HER RACE

She has not grown uncivil
As narrow natures would
And called the pleasures evil
Happier days thought good;
She knows herself a woman
No red and white of a face,
Or rank, raised from a common
Unreckonable race;
And how should her heart fail her
Or sickness break her will
With her dead brother's valour
For an example still.

VI

HER COURAGE

When her soul flies to the predestined dancing-place
(I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made
Amid the dreams of youth) let her come face to face,
Amid that first astonishment, with Grania's shade
All but the perils of the woodland flight forgot
That made her Dermuid dear, and some old cardinal
Pacing with half-closed eyelids in a sunny spot
Who had murmured of Giorgione at his latest breath —
Aye and Achilles, Timor, Babar, Barhaim, all
Who have lived in joy and laughed in the face of Death.

SELECTED POEMS

VII

HER FRIENDS BRING HER A CHRISTMAS TREE

Pardon, great enemy,
Without an angry thought
We've carried in our tree,
And here and there have bought
Till all the boughs are gay,
And she may look from the bed
On pretty things that may
Please a fantastic head.
Give her a little grace,
What if a laughing eye
Have looked into your face —
It is about to die.

THE CAT AND THE MOON

The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon
The creeping cat looked up.
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
For wander and wail as he would
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.
Minnaloushe runs in the grass,
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?
When two close kindred meet
What better than call a dance,
Maybe the moon may learn,
Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place,
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range?

SELECTED POEMS

Minnaleshe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

TWO SONGS OF A FOOL

I

A speckled cat and a tame hare
Eat at my hearthstone
And sleep there;
And both look up to me alone
For learning and defence
As I look up to Providence.

I start out of my sleep to think
Some day I may forget
Their food and drink;
Or, the house door left unshut,
The hare may run till it's found
The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

I bear a burden that might well try
Men that do all by rule,
And what can I
That am a wandering witted fool
But pray to God that He ease
My great responsibilities.

SELECTED POEMS

II

I slept on my three-legged stool by the fire,
The speckled cat slept on my knee;
We never thought to enquire
Where the brown hare might be,
And whether the door were shut.
Who knows how she drank the wind
Stretched up on two legs from the mat,
Before she had settled her mind
To drum with her heel and to leap:
Had I but awakened from sleep
And called her name she had heard,
It may be, and had not stirred,
That now, it may be, has found
The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

ANOTHER SONG OF A FOOL

This great purple butterfly,
In the prison of my hands,
Has a learning in his eye
Not a poor fool understands.

Once he lived a schoolmaster
With a stark, denying look,
A string of scholars went in fear
Of his great birch and his great book.

Like the clangour of a bell,
Sweet and harsh, harsh and sweet,
That is how he learnt so well
To take the roses for his meat.

NOTES

The Meditation of the Old Fisherman (p. 6).—This poem is founded upon some things a fisherman said to me when out fishing in Sligo Bay.

Down by the Salley Gardens (p. 7).—An extension of three lines sung to me by W. B. Yeats, an old woman at Ballisodare.

The Land of Heart's Desire (p. 27).—This little play was produced at the Avenue Theatre in the spring of 1891, with the following cast:—Maurteen Bruin, Mr. James Welch; Shawn Bruin, Mr. A. E. W. Mason; Father Hart, Mr. G. R. Foss; Bridget Bruin, Miss Charlotte Morland; Maire Bruin, Miss Winifred Fraser; A Faery Child, Miss Dorothy Paget. It ran for a little over six weeks. It was revived in America in 1901, when it was taken on tour by Mrs. Lemoyne. It has been played two or three times professionally since then in America and a great many times in England and America by amateurs. Till lately it was not part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, for I had grown to dislike it without knowing what I disliked in it. This winter, however, I have made many revisions and now it plays well enough to give me pleasure. It is printed in this book in the new form, which was acted for the first time on February 22, 1912, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. At the Abbey Theatre, where the platform of the stage comes out in front of the curtain, the curtain falls before the priest's last words. He remains outside the curtain and the words are spoken to the audience like an epilogue.

The Countess Cathleen (p. 53) was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M.

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Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkinson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as The Countess Cathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love-scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences—even at the Abbey Theatre—are almost ignorant of Irish mythology, or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the proscenium and have a flight of steps at one side, up which the Angel comes and crosses towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the balcony which light up the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary.

SELECTED POEMS

The room at Shemus Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain—a colour which becomes full of rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play when played without interval in this way lasts about an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows:—

MERCHANTS *rush out.* ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.*

ALEEL.

They're rising up—they're rising through the earth,
Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,
And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.
But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round,
Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

He moves about as though the air was full of spirits. OONA *enters.*

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm,

OONA.

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled;
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL.

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA.

God guard her soul.

ALEEL.

She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words,

The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN

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*and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL.
She lies there as if dead.*

OONA.

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.

A PEASANT.

We were under the tree where the path turns
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN.

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.

PEASANTS.

Hush!

PEASANTS.

Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

CATHLEEN (*half rising*).

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman; judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN.

And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN.

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN.

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep

SELECTED POEMS

Too great awhile, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me
And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child—and therefore happy,
Therefore happy even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair and I must go.

[*She dies.*]

OONA.

Bring me the looking-glass.

*A WOMAN brings it to her out of inner room, OONA holds
glass over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is silent for a mo-
ment, then she speaks in a half-scream.*

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT.

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT.

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN.

The little plant I loved is broken in two.

*ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon floor,
so that it is broken in many pieces.*

ALEEL.

I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more;
And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror
Are but a ball of passionate dust again!
And level earth and plummy sea, rise up!
And haughty sky, fall down!

A PEASANT WOMAN.

Pull him upon his knees,
His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL.

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.

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Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye!

A winged ANGEL, carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the R. with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The ANGEL is about to pass out to the L. when ALEEL speaks. The ANGEL stops a moment and turns.

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things:
And tell of her who lies there.

The ANGEL turns again and is about to go, but is seized by ALEEL.

Till you speak

You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL.

The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide.
And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.

OONA.

Tell them to walk upon the floor of peace,
That I would die and go to her I love,
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

The Hosting of the Sidhe (p. 107).—The gods of ancient Ireland, the Tuatha De Danaan, or the Tribes of the goddess Danu, or the Sidhe, from Aes Sidhe, or Sluagh Sidhe, the people of the Faery Hills, as these words are usually explained, still ride the country as of old. Sidhe is also Gaelic for wind, and certainly the Sidhe have much to do with the wind. They journey in whirling wind, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages, Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old goddess. When the country people see the leaves whirling on the road they bless themselves, because they believe the Sidhe to be passing by.

SELECTED POEMS

They are almost always said to wear no covering upon their heads, and to let their hair stream out; and the great among them, for they have great and simple, go much upon horseback. If anyone becomes too much interested in them, and sees them overmuch, he loses all interest in ordinary things.

A woman near Gort, in Galway, says: "There is a boy, now, of the Clorans; but I wouldn't for the world let them think I spoke of him; it's two years since he came from America, and since that time he never went to Mass, or to church, or to fairs, or to market, or to stand on the cross roads, or to hurling, or to nothing. And if anyone comes into the house, it's into the room he'll slip, not to see them; and as to work, he has the garden dug to bits, and the whole place smeared with cow dung; and such a crop as was never seen; and the alders all plaited till they look grand. One day he went as far as the chapel; but as soon as he got to the door he turned straight round again, as if he hadn't power to pass it. I wonder he wouldn't get the priest to read a Mass for him, or something; but the crop he had is grand, and you may know well he has some to help him." One hears many stories of the kind; and a man whose son is believed to go out riding among them at night tells me that he is careless about everything and lies in bed until it late in the day. A doctor believes this boy to be mad. Those that are at times "away," as it is called, know all things, but are afraid to speak. A countryman at Kiltartan says, "There was one of the Lydons — John — was away for seven years, lying in his bed, but brought away at nights, and he knew everything; and one, Kearney, up in the mountains, a cousin of his own, lost two hoggets, and came and told him, and he knew the very spot where they were, and told him, and he got them back again. But *they* were vexed at that, and took away the power, so that he never knew anything again, no more than another."

Knocknarea is in Sligo, and the country people say that Maeve, still a great queen of the western Sidhe, is buried in the cairn of stones upon it. I have written of Clooth-na-Bare in "The Celtic Twilight." She "went all over the world, seeking a lake deep enough to drown her faery life, of which she had grown weary, leaping from hill to hill, and setting up a cairn of stones wherever her feet lighted, until, at last, she found the deepest water in the world in little Lough Ia, on the

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top of the bird mountain, in Sligo." I forgot, now, where I heard this story, but it may have been from a priest at Col-looney. Clooth-na-Bare would mean the old woman of Bare, but is evidently a corruption of Cailleac Bare, the old woman Bare, who, under the names Bare, and Berah, and Beri, and Verah, and Dera, and Dhira, appears in the legends of many places. Mr. O'Grady found her haunting Lough Liath high up on the top of a mountain of the Fews the Slieve Fuadh, or Slieve G-Cullain of old times, under the name of the Caileac Buillia. He describes Lough Liath as a desolate moon-shaped lake, with made wells and sunken passages upon its borders, and beset by marsh and heather and grey boulders, and closes his "Flight of the Eagle" with a long rhapsody upon mountain and lake, because of the heroic tales and beautiful old myths that have hung about them always. He identifies the Cailleac Buillia with that Meluchra who persuaded Fionn to go to her amid the waters of Lough Liath, and so changed him with her enchantments, that, though she had to free him because of the threats of the Fiana, his hair was ever afterwards as white as snow. To this day the Tuatha De Danaan that are in the waters beckon to men, and drown them in the waters; and Bare or Dhira, or Meluchra, or whatever name one likes the best, is, doubtless, the name of a mistress among them. Meluchra was daughter of Cullain; and Cullain Mr. O'Grady calls, upon I know not what authority, a form of Lir, the master of waters. The people of the waters have been in all ages beautiful and changeable and lascivious, or beautiful and wise and lonely, for water is everywhere the signature of the fruitfulness of the body and of the fruitfulness of dreams. The white hair of Fionn may be but another of the troubles of those that come to unearthly wisdom and earthly trouble, and the threats and violence of the Fiana against her, a different form of the threats and violence the country people use, to make the Aes Sidhe give up those that are "away." Bare is now often called an ugly old woman, but in the "Song of Bare," which Lady Gregory has given in her "Saints and Wonders," she laments her lost beauty after the withering of seven hundred years; and Dr. Joyce says that one of her old names was Aebhin, which means beautiful. Aebhin was the goddess of the tribes of northern Leinster; and the lover she

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had made immortal, and who loved her perfectly, left her, and put on mortality, to fight among them against the stranger, and died on the strand of Clontarf.

The Song of Wandering Aengus (p. 112).—The Tuatha De Danaan can take all shapes, and those that are in the waters take often the shape of fish. A woman of Burren, in Galway, says, "There are more of them in the sea than on the land, and they sometimes try to come over the side of the boat in the form of fishes for they can take their choice shape." At other times they are beautiful women; and another Galway woman says, "Surely those things are in the sea as well as on land. My father was out fishing one night off Tyrone. And something came beside the boat that had eyes shining like candles. And then a wave came in, and a storm rose all in a minute, and whatever was in the wave, the weight of it had like to sink the boat. And then they saw that it was a woman in the sea that had the shining eyes. So my father went to the priest, and he bid him always to take a drop of holy water and a pinch of salt out in the boat with him, and nothing could harm him."

The poem was suggested to me by a Greek folk song; but the folk belief of Greece is very like that of Ireland, and I certainly thought, when I wrote it, of Ireland, and of the spirits that are in Ireland. An old man who was cutting a quickset hedge near Gort, in Galway, said, only the other day, "One time I was cutting timber over in Inchy, and about eight o'clock one morning, when I got there, I saw a girl picking nuts, with her hair hanging down over her shoulders; brown hair; and she had a good, clean face, and she was tall, and nothing on her head, and her dress no way gaudy, but simple. And when she felt me coming she gathered herself up, and was gone, as if the earth had swallowed her up. And I followed her, and looked for her, but I never could see her again from that day to this, never again."

The county Galway people use the word "clean" in its old sense of fresh and comely.

He Mourns for the Change that has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the world. (p. 114).—My deer and hound are properly related to the deer and hound that flicker in and out of the various tellings of the Arthurian

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legends, leading different knights upon adventures, and to the hounds and to the hornless deer at the beginning of, I think, all tellings of Usheen's journey to the country of the young. The hound is certainly related to the Hounds of Annwoyn or of Hades, who are white, and have red ears, and were heard, and are, perhaps, still heard by Welsh peasants, following some flying thing in the night winds; and he is probably related to the hounds that Irish country people believe will awake and seize the souls of the dead if you lament them too loudly or too soon. An old woman told a friend and myself that she saw what she thought were white birds, flying over an enchanted place, but found, when she got near, that they had dogs' heads; and I do not doubt that my hound and these dog-headed birds are of the same family. I got my hound and deer out of a last century Gaelic poem about Usheen's journey to the country of the young. After the hunting of the hornless deer that leads him to the seashore, and while he is riding over the sea with Niam, he sees amid the waters—I have not the Gaelic poem by me, and describe it from memory—a young man following a girl who had a golden apple, and afterwards a hound with one red ear following a deer with no horns. This hound and this deer seem plain images of the desire of man “which is for the woman,” and “the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man,” and of all desires that are as these. I have read them in this way in “the Wanderings of Usheen” or Oisín, and have made my lover sigh because he has seen in their faces “the immortal desire of immortals.”

The man in my poem who has a hazel wand may have been Aengus, Master of Love; and I have made the boar without bristles come out of the West, because the place of sunset was in Ireland, as in other countries, a place of symbolic darkness and death.

The Cap and Bells (p. 120).—I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write it in prose or verse. The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the

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way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said "the authors are in eternity," and I am quite sure they can only be questioned in dreams.

The Valley of the Black Pig (p. 122).—All over Ireland there are prophecies of the coming rout of the enemies of Ireland, in a certain Valley of the Black Pig and these prophecies are, no doubt, now, as they were in Fenian days, a political force. I have heard of one man who would not give any money to the Land League, because the Battle could not be until the close of the century; but, as a rule periods of trouble bring prophecies of its near coming. A few years before my time an old man who lived at Lisadill, in Sligo used to fall down in a fit and rave out descriptions of the Battle; and a man in Sligo has told me that it will be so great a Battle that the horses shall go up to their fetlocks in blood and that their girths when it is over will rot from their bellies for lack of a hand to unbuckle them. If one reads Professor Rhys' "Celtic Heathendom" by the light of Professor Frazer's "Golden Bough," and puts together what one finds there about the boar that killed Diarmuid, and other old Celtic boars and sows, one sees that the battle is mythological, and that the Pig it is named from must be a type of cold and winter doing battle with the summer, or of death battling with life. For the purposes of poetry, at any rate, I think it a symbol of the darkness that will destroy the world. The country people say there is no shape for a spirit to take so dangerous as the shape of a pig; and a Galway blacksmith—and blacksmiths are thought to be specially protected—says he would be afraid to meet a pig on the road at night; and another Galway man tells this story. "There was a man coming the road from Gort to Garryland one night, and he had a drop taken; and before him, on the road, he saw a pig walking; and having a drop in, he gave a shout, and make a kick at it, and bid it get out of that. And by the time he got home, his arm was swelled from the shoulder to be as big as a bag and he couldn't use his hand with the pain of it. And his wife brought him, after a few days, to a woman that used to do cures at Rahasane. And on the road all she could do would hardly keep him from lying down to sleep on the grass. And when they got to the woman

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she knew all that happened; and 'and,' says she, 'it's well for you that your wife didn't let you fall asleep on the grass, for if you had done that but even for one instant, you'd be a lost man.'"

Professor Rhys, who considers the bristleless boar a symbol of darkness and cold, rather than of winter and cold, thinks it was without bristles because the darkness is shorn away by the sun.

The Battle should, I believe, be compared with three other battles; a battle the Sidhe are said to fight when a person is being taken away by them; a battle they are said to fight in November, for the harvest; the great battle the Tuatha De Danaan fought, according to the Gaelic chroniclers, with the Fomor at Moy Tura, or the Towery Plain.

I have heard of the battle over the dying both in County Galway and in the Isles of Aran, and old Aran fisherman having told me that it was fought over two of his children, and that he found blood in a box he had for keeping fish, when it was over; and I have written about it, and given examples elsewhere. A faery doctor, on the borders of Galway and Clare, explained it as a battle between the friends and enemies of the dying, the one party trying to take them, the other trying to save them from being taken. It may once, when the land of the Sidhe was the only other world, and when every man who died was carried thither, have always accompanied death. I suggest that the battle between the Tuatha De Danaan, the powers of light, and warmth, and fruitfulness, and goodness, and the Fomor, the powers of darkness, and cold, and barrenness, and badness upon the Towery Plain, was the establishment of the habitable world, the rout of the ancestral darkness; that the battle among the Sidhe for the harvest is the annual battle of summer and winter; that the battle among the Sidhe at the man's death is the battle of life and death; and that the battle of the Black Pig is the battle between the manifest world and the ancestral darkness at the end of all things; and that all these battles are one: the battle of all things with decay. Once a symbolism has possessed the imagination of large numbers of men it becomes as I believe an embodiment of disembodied powers and repeats itself in dreams and visions age after age.

On Baile's Strand (p. 165) was first played, in a version considerably different from the present, on December 27th,

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1904, at the opening of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the following cast:—

CUCHULAIN	F. J. Fay.
CONCHOBAR	George Roberts.
DAIRE (<i>an old king not now in the play</i>)	G. MacDonald.
THE BLIND MAN	Seumas O'Sullivan.
THE FOOL	William Fay.
THE YOUNG MAN	P. MacShiubhlaigh.

The old and young kings were played by the following:—
R. Nash, A. Power, U. Wright, E. Keegan, Emma Vernon, Miss Garvey, Dora Gunning, Sarah Allgood. It was necessary to put women into men's parts owing to the smallness of our company at that time. It were indefensible could we have helped it.

The play was revived by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., in a somewhat altered version at Oxford, Cambridge, and London a few months later. I then entirely rewrote it up to the entrance of the Young Man, and changed it a good deal from that on to the end, and this new version was played at the Abbey Theatre for the first time in April, 1906.

Deirdre (p. 203) was first played at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 24th, 1906, with the following cast:—

MUSICIANS	(Miss Sara Allgood. (Miss Maire O'Neill. (Miss Brigit O'Dempsey.
FERGUS, <i>an old man</i>	Arthur Sinclair.
NAISI, <i>a young king</i>	F. J. Fay.
DEIRDRE, <i>his queen</i>	Miss Darragh.
A DARK-FACED MESSENGER	U. Wright.
CONCHUBAR	J. M. Kerrigan.
DARK-FACED EXECUTIONER	A. Power.

Since then the principal part has been taken by Miss Mona Limerick, Miss Sara Allgood and Maire O'Neill; and by Mrs. Patrick Campbell who played it in Dublin and London with the Abbey Company in 1907 and 1908 as well as playing it with a company of her own in London in the Autumn of 1907.



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